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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the outcomes of a review of the Wyoming Department of Education's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) in meeting the professional development needs of special education. There were two phases of the 1997-1998 CSPD needs assessment process. Phase One consisted of telephone interviews with both regular (n=26) and special education (n=43) teachers. During Phase Two, information was obtained from directors of special education during five focus groups and a sixth focus group with preschool directors and others involved in providing services to preschool children. Findings indicate: (1) there is an increase in the number of students in special education and a higher proportion of students demonstrating attention, emotional, and behavioral types of disorders; (2) teachers want training which is focused, practical, and hands-on; (3) teachers appear to be receptive to expertise provided from fellow teachers and others who have actually been in the classroom; (4) teachers find ongoing, informal types of professional development activities to be the most useful; (5) teachers feel particularly unprepared to cope with children with emotional and behavior disorders; (6) boundaries between professional development for special education personnel and professional development provided for regular educators need to be eradicated. Appendices include interview protocols. (CR)

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Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
Wyoming Statewide Needs Assessment

March 1998

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As directed by:

Wyoming Department of Education

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I. Background of the Study

In March 1997, the Center for School Improvement (CSI) was contracted by the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) to assist in collecting 1997-1998 data pertinent to the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD). *CSPD* refers to federally established guidelines regarding numerous data that are to be collected on the professional development needs of special education. These include data pertinent to: 1) the supply and demand of special education personnel; 2) preservice training needs related to special education; 3) ongoing training needs for special education; 4) the various target groups in need of training; and 5) identification of specific topic areas in which development is needed.

In the past, the primary means of collecting data for CSPD has consisted of an annual survey mailed out to special education personnel across the state. Upon review of the results from this statewide survey, the WDE noted several deficiencies, including:

- A very poor response rate, which indicated that the data being collected were not necessarily reflective of the broader population at large;
- That the same needs were being identified from year to year regardless of state-level actions designed to address such needs. This suggested a lack of sensitivity in that the instrument was not able to pick up changing and emergent needs.
- Feedback from local districts that the data being provided to them was not useful for planning purposes. This was due, in part, because of the previously mentioned response rate (which was very poor) and to widely perceived deficiencies in the quality of the survey instrument.
- A general lack of credibility among local personnel with the CSPD process. This was due to a widespread perception that the process was useless, thus, why should they bother to participate since "nothing useful ever came out of it."

In light of these deficiencies, the WDE requested that CSI review and revise the CSPD needs assessment process. Given the aforementioned climate in the state in regards to CSPD, researchers from CSI determined that, at this point in time CSPD would benefit greatly from utilizing more qualitative data collection techniques as a means of collecting *in-depth* information. It was felt that this would accomplish two things. First, it would provide detailed data which could be used to help determine what should be included on any quantitative survey instrument developed in the future *or* it would help identify alternative means of data collection that might be useful in future CSPD needs assessments. Second, it was felt that dramatically revamping the method of data collection would help jumpstart CSPD in Wyoming in terms of: 1) signaling a departure from how things have been done in the past; and 2) providing people in the state with an opportunity to share their views and feel that they are being heard. *Of course, more than just being heard, the credibility of CSPD will only be restored if people in the state see a direct link between what they have told us they need and the responsiveness of the WDE in responding to articulated needs.* This depends on what is done in regards to the findings described in the body of this report.

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II. Project Overview

There were two phases to the 1997-1998 CSPD Needs Assessment process. ***Phase One*** consisted of telephone interviews conducted over the Summer of 1997 with both regular and special education teachers. During ***Phase Two*** of the CSPD Needs Assessment, information was obtained from Directors of Special Education during five focus groups conducted in conjunction with Regional WASEA meetings held between November 1997 and January 1998. A sixth focus group was also held in January with Preschool Directors and others involved in providing services to Pre-K children.

Copies of the protocols used for the telephone interviews and the focus groups are included as Appendix A. Generally, all protocols developed as part of this study were designed to obtain information pertaining to the following areas:

- What are the most pressing areas of need for professional development related to special education?
- Are there certain types of training(s) that are *better* than others? Specifically, what have they found to be useful and not useful in the professional development they have received in the past?
- What types of skills do new teachers need in order to be prepared to serve special education students?
- Do respondents see any trends in terms of future training needs? How do such trends correspond to observed changes in the composition of the population of special education students?
- What are the barriers to providing and accessing professional development opportunities?
- What methods of data collection for CSPD would they find valuable and responsive to changing needs?

With the permission of participants, all interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and subsequently transcribed. A content analyses was then performed on the transcriptions in order to systematically identify emergent themes and issues pertaining to the questions of interest. Names of individuals were omitted from all transcribed materials, thus any verbatim comments used in this report cannot be attributed to any specific individual(s). In addition, concerns regarding confidentiality necessitated that results *not* be disaggregated by individual school districts and are reported either statewide, regionally or by certain demographic features (e.g., small and large districts, etc.). Nonetheless, it should be noted that *most of the trends described in this report transcend both district and regional lines*.

At this time, researchers would like to gratefully acknowledge the willingness and candidness of all respondents in sharing their important views and opinions with us. The results from these telephone interviews and discussion groups provide useful, relevant, detailed and in-depth information to those responsible for planning professional development activities at the district, regional and state levels.

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III. Phase One: Telephone Interviews with Teachers

The selection process for identifying teachers to participate in the telephone interviews involved contacting Directors of Special Education in all districts and asking them to nominate teachers to participate in the study. Directors were asked to select teachers who represented a range of experience levels and settings -- although the one requirement was that *all teachers* have a strong interest in the area of special education. The rationale behind sampling in such a purposeful manner was that it was felt that such teachers would be a knowledgeable and interested group of individuals who would be willing to provide their candid views and observations regarding the status of special education in Wyoming schools today.

If a teacher agreed to participate in the study, they filled out a sheet which was then submitted to the Center for School Improvement (CSI). This sheet included information on how to contact the teacher by phone, times that would be convenient to call, and any dates that the teacher would be out of town during the summer (See Appendix B for a copy of the nomination letter and response form).

Exactly 79 interviews were conducted over the summer with each interview taking between 40 and 80 minutes to complete. Demographic characteristics of the teachers interviewed are presented in Table 1 below, disaggregated by Region.

Note that the five regions correspond to WASEA regional boundaries, with Region One including Albany, Carbon, Converse, Goshen, Laramie, Natrona, Niobrara, and Platte County School Districts. Region Two includes Lincoln, Sublette, Sweetwater, Teton, and Uinta County School Districts. Region Three includes Fremont County School Districts. Region Four includes Big Horn, Hot Springs, Park and Washakie County School Districts. Region Five includes Campbell, Crook, Johnson, Sheridan, and Weston County School Districts.

Table 1.
Demographics: Teacher Interviews

AREA	Gender		Level				Position Type			Total
	Female	Male	Elementary	Middle	High	Multiple Levels	Special Ed	Regular Ed	Other	
Region I	17	4	7	3	6	4	12	7	2	21
Region II	15	2	8	5	2	-	9	6	2	17
Region III	11	1	5	3	3	-	5	4	3	12
Region IV	15	5	8	3	2	5	11	7	2	20
Region V	5	4	6	2	1	-	6	2	1	9
TOTAL	63	16	34	16	14	9	43	26	10	79

In general, this was a very experienced group of individuals who were familiar with issues related to special education and who had ample opportunity over the course of their professional careers to make relevant and important observations pertaining to this area. Illustrating this point, 21 of the respondents had been working with special education students for more than three years and 43 had worked with them for more than six years. The settings in which they worked varied, with 38 respondents working in inclusion classrooms (e.g., regular classroom), 24 working primarily in a self-contained/resource room, and 12 dividing their time equally between an inclusion setting and some type of resource room setting. Thirty two respondents had graduate degrees (e.g., Masters or above) and the rest had Bachelors Degrees. Approximately 32 of the respondents had attended the University of Wyoming at some point during their academic career.

The table below describes the types of disabilities served by this group of individuals, *listed out in descending order of frequency overall*:

Table 2.
Types of Disabilities Served

Disability Category	Approximate Number of Students in Each Category					
	Region I	Region II	Region III	Region IV	Region V	TOTAL
Learning Disability	28	163	104	139	77	511
Speech/Language Disability	32	71	41	4	3	151
Emotional Disability	30	20	36	24	10	120
ADHD	5	20	80	8	3	116
Mental Disability	17	25	9	27	2	80
Multiple Disabilities	27	4	5	3	3	42
Health Disability	12	18	7	-	-	37
Other Type of Disability	5	-	11	3	12	31
Developmental Disability	-	-	-	14	4	18
Hearing Disability	1	8	1	4	-	12
Autistic Disability	2	1	2	5	-	10
ADD	3	3	3	-	-	9
Orthopedic Disability	-	3	-	3	-	6
Visual Disability	1	1	-	-	3	5
Traumatic Brain Injury Disability	1	2	1	-	-	4
Deaf-Blind disability	-	-	-	3	1	4

What follows is a brief synopsis of the results from the telephone interviews conducted with teachers across Wyoming. Results are based upon responses from teachers representing 33 of the 48 districts in the state.

Finding #1: *In terms of overall trends, there is an increase in the number of students being brought into special education and a relatively higher proportion of these students are demonstrating attention, emotional and behavioral types of disorders.*

Respondents noticed a number of emergent trends in terms of the composition of the special education population of students. Table 3 below describes the top ten trends mentioned, listed in descending order of frequency.

Table 3.
Composition of Special Education Students
Observed Trends

Trends	Number of times mentioned*					
	Region I	Region II	Region III	Region IV	Region V	TOTAL
Increase in # in population/ More students are being identified	9	3	31	5	4	52
More ADD	4	5	18	3	-	30
More Emotionally Disturbed	3	6	17	-	1	27
No Differences	4	1	12	2	1	20
More Behavioral Disorders	2	3	13	-	1	19
More learning disabled	-	1	8	3	1	13
More students with severe disabilities	-	2	5	-	-	7
More autism	-	-	4	2	-	6
More Fetal Alcohol Syndrome	-	-	4	-	-	4
More Language Deficit	-	2	-	-	-	2

** Note that this was a multiple response question, thus the number of responses will not correspond to the number of respondents*

- In particular, Regions II & III are experiencing an increase in the number of BD, ED and ADD children served by special education.
- Participants from Region III indicated that students with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome were more of a concern for them in terms of service provision – as compared to the other regions.

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Finding #2: *Teachers want training which is focused, practical, and hands-on. Similarly, they feel that preservice should also provide more hands-on types of training opportunities.*

All staff emphasized that the types of trainings they found to be most valuable are those that focus on practical, hands-on applications. As opposed to more theory-oriented approaches they wanted ideas and suggestions that could be immediately translated into the classroom.

> **I need to know what I should do when the kid picks up the scissors and cuts all the buttons off of his shirt – right then and there.**

> **I guess my problem with a lot of the things we've had in Wyoming is that they're more theory than they are actual hands on and that's why I feel like I learn more when I go into a classroom and watch than I do when I go to a conference.**

In addition, many teachers indicated that they preferred trainings to be *focused*, covering specific topics and issues rather than being more generalized. Part of this was due to the fact that teachers will seek out specific information relevant to the population they are *currently* serving, thus priorities regarding professional development may change every six months or yearly in accordance with student populations.

> **I felt that some of the trainings didn't pertain to the population I was working with. I really try to pick and choose according to the students that I am working with. I like it if the topics are pretty specific, not real broad, so that I know exactly what I will be getting out of that session.**

> **When I invest the time to leave my classroom to go to a workshop of some type it needs to be something that I have an immediate need for within the next six months to a year – no longer away than that.**

Along these same lines, respondents were asked about what they felt were the strengths and weaknesses in the postsecondary training they had received related to special education. The most frequently obtained response from respondents who had attended the University of Wyoming was that they felt that their preparation had involved too much theory and too few hands-on experiences. Several respondents noted that, although they had some student teaching which was helpful, there was: 1) not enough of it; and 2) not enough experiences teaching diverse groups of students.

> **You can read all the books in the world and listen to all the lectures in the world and nothing compares to actually working in a residential facility or psychiatric hospital, that type of thing, or student teaching or whatever, which is what I would advocate more of.**

In addition, several respondents thought that both special educators and regular educators would benefit greatly from having some experience teaching *all* kinds of children. So,

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special educators could have experience teaching regular education students and regular educators could have experience teaching special education children

> **I think that no teacher should graduate from college without a joint endorsement in special education and regular education. I think that we have gotten to the point where our special education needs have become so great that our regular ed and special ed teachers should all have the same training and that way we won't have the division between a regular educator and a special educator. Everybody will be educators and then I think we would be more open to the collaboration of teachers.**

Apparently, people learn most about providing services to special education students by *doing*, experimenting with different approaches with various students and seeing what "works." They need to be in the classroom or a setting in which they are exposed to diverse populations of students and situations. It is difficult if not impossible to speculate about all the different types of issues or problems that may come up – one needs to experience them and practice coping or, even better, have the opportunity to watch how other more experienced teachers deal with these events.

Finding #3: *Teachers appear to be receptive to expertise provided from fellow teachers and others who have actually been in the classroom and, in general, they find the expertise of their peers to be invaluable in helping them serve their students. However,* ***time*** *remains the primary barrier to the sharing among professionals which teachers find to be so useful.*

If teachers are uncertain as to how to handle a given situation, or encounter a student with a disability with which they are less familiar, they seek out their peers for help – be it a special education teacher, regular education teacher, administrator, psychologist, speech or occupational therapist. Corresponding with this finding is the fact that teachers want to hear from people who have been in the classroom. They often prefer presenters to be fellow educators who know what it is like to be "on the front lines" so to speak.

> **I think that peer instruction is well-attended. People from my district like to go hear other teachers who have tried some of the newer advancements, whether team teaching or multi-aide classroom, or inclusion type of stuff. I think that our people like to hear from other teachers who are actually doing it and then share what their experiences have been. I know that is my preference, given the amount of time and resources there are for training sessions I would rather hear from someone who is actually working with kids in either a clinical or school setting.**
>
> **We've had specialists come in and give us classes and what I didn't like is that they did not respect our experiences as teachers. They are so far away from the classroom and not in touch with what happens in the real world.**

Indeed, perhaps the most prevalent and striking finding that came out of these interviews is that one of the forms of professional development that teachers find *most useful* is simply being given the opportunity to *access their peers*.

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I loved having the time to talk to my peers about students or problems I had had, because on a day to day basis you never have time to say your thoughts out loud or your questions or concerns. At the trainings you have time to do the peer relationships and the building with other colleagues was invaluable ... just invaluable ... and giving you new ideas when you're too tired to think and it might just spark an idea and you jot it down in the margins of your notes and then you go back and it gives you insight into a student.

I like the knowledge but I also just like talking to other people around the state and seeing where we are at.

Respondents unfailingly mentioned that it is invaluable for them to talk with other teachers in order to discuss difficulties they have encountered and compare notes on the different strategies that they have found to be successful. In addition, when asked where they had learned the most about special education, teachers invariably answered that they had learned the most from being on the job and from such peer relationships.

I learn the most from my peers, my experience in working with students. I learn a lot from the people I work with and my experience in dealing with those kids.

The teachers interviewed did not really seem to need that much training regarding the collaborative model, rather, *what they needed was the* ***time*** *to collaborate with each other.*

Training isn't nearly as important as finding the time to collaborate.

The biggest problem is finding time to meet with people. When you don't have common planning periods, and most of us don't, it is a problem. There is only so many lunch hours that you can meet and, again, you are supervising the lunch room or on some prom committee or whatever – you don't have the time to collaborate.

TIME. Time to do it. Time to plan. Time to get it worked together and, of course, the time for the resource teacher to be in my classroom instead of her own. There aren't enough people to go around.

Collaboration does occur *within* schools and, generally, such experiences are positive and fruitful. Across all the districts, generally positive and ongoing collaborative networks have been established among the teachers who are responsible for providing services to special education students. Similarly, it appears that such collaborative relationships provide the type of ongoing, job-embedded staff development that teachers find to be most useful. However, the *biggest obstacle to such collaborative efforts is that teachers are not systematically provided with time to talk with one another.* Teachers need to be specifically allocated time to talk with one another as opposed to being left to their own devices to "catch" one another.

I think information to the classroom teachers and support personnel on planning. Because to be effectively collaborating you have to have time to visit with that person and that's one thing that they don't have is extra time. So I think flexibility within the building by the administration to allow the teachers time to visit. You have to talk to the other person to be effective, and it can't be five minutes here and five minutes there, it has to be a set time where it's free of interruptions and then

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once the routine goes, it becomes easier and the time can become less because you know what is expected.

We have great opportunities for collaboration but you need time, you have to have time and we tried after school, we tried before school and it just doesn't work.

Notably, a small handful of schools have recognized this need and have built time into their teachers schedules for them to talk with one another.

Our school provides time once a week where we can sign up for time to collaborate with other teachers in the building. We have a substitute that comes in every Friday and she subs in the regular education room and I have aides that cover for me and we can meet with whoever we need to throughout the day. So I have as much time as I need to meet with them every Friday and it doesn't take away from my children and I'm covered and I can collaborate on things that are happening. So we are really lucky and I'm not sure that any other district has this type of thing to have every Friday open for collaboration and it is really important. I think that is why our teachers are excellent.

They are right -- they are lucky. There are few, if any, other schools or districts that permit such systematic time for collaboration. Schools and districts elsewhere in Wyoming would do well to follow in the footsteps of this innovative school. It is apparent that such participants find these Fridays to be an invaluable resource tool for themselves professionally, as well as for their students.

Finding #4: *Oftentimes, teachers find ongoing, informal types of professional development activities to be the most useful in terms of helping them effectively fulfill their day-to-day responsibilities. Such alternative forms of professional development includes: 1) time for collaboration, informal discussions, and sharing of resources among teachers; 2) mentoring and or job shadowing types of arrangements; and 3) visiting other programs and service provision settings.*

It is ironic that the very types of informal activities that are often not perceived as professional development per se, are the very types of activities that teachers feel they get the most out of in terms of helping them provide services to students on a daily basis. Such activities consist of such things as arranging times for informal discussion among teachers and providing teachers with opportunities to observe one another.

I think what was most useful was I got to go around the high school building and even the middle and elementary schools and observe other instructors. It was a real good thing to do because normally all I do is instruct all day and never get a chance to see what the other guy is doing.

All of this suggests that districts need to provide time for teachers to engage in informal discussion, peer tutoring, classroom observation and mentoring arrangements. Notably, these are also the types of ongoing, job-embedded professional development that the current research suggests to be most effective in terms of promoting change and ongoing improvement in actual classroom practices.

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We will have a scheduled visit between school districts where teachers will go visit other schools. This is my two week training time this year, where I will go out and visit schools.

Probably someone who can really use some help is the first year teacher in the district. It would really be beneficial for them to work under a master teacher for a year. Hold them close for an entire year and collaborate. Often times they get the really rough kids to work with which I think is a poor decision on the administrations part. They would be more apt to stay in teaching and become really good teachers if they had a better start.

In addition, although teachers seem to access one another within their school and, to a lesser extent, their district, they do not seem to be aware of the resources available in their region and state in terms of specific individuals who may have expertise in particular areas. Many respondents noted that they will oftentimes seek out a particular topic depending on who their students are. If a teacher gets a student with a disability which he/she is relatively unfamiliar with, they will seek out information in this area. This finding coupled with the fact that teachers find professional networks to be so informative and rewarding suggest that both a regional and statewide resource directory related to special education would be very useful. Such a directory could be organized and referenced by various topic areas. As well as providing contacts and names, such a directory could also provide descriptions of model programs and endeavors being undertaken elsewhere in the state.

But I think that, rather than reinventing the wheel all the time, that if something is working really well in another district that we find out about that and can share that and with that district and also share our experiences with other districts. Perhaps like the old state teacher convention where teachers can get together, I think those are greatly missed. I think we would be better off even if we would have those kinds of things now where people had the opportunity to get together on a regular basis.

With transition I feel that would require visiting other districts that have a really good program working. Other small rural districts that would have some of the similar problems that we have.

It would be nice to see how other districts and schools do it. You get stuck in one process and you need to broaden your views on collaboration.

The above discussion should not in anyway suggest that more formal types of professional development via workshops and seminars are not useful. Contrary to this, most teachers found that the majority of workshops and trainings they have attended to be very useful. They especially liked going to these types of meetings so that they could stay current on the latest developments in special education.

Respondents were also asked about which topic areas they felt they would need training in over the next year. Results from this question are reported in Table 4 below.

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Table 4.
Which three topics are your highest priorities for development in the next year?

Priority Area	Number of Respondents who indicated they need this					
	Region I	Region II	Region III	Region IV	Region V	TOTAL
Inclusion	7	7	3	7	3	27
Behavior management	10	4	4	2	4	24
Techniques for dealing with emotionally disturbed children	-	5	4	7	2	18
ADD/ADHD	4	-	4	6	3	17
Updates on rules & regulations	3	3	4	-	1	11
Reading strategies	3	2	2	-	1	8
Provision of modifications and adaptations	-	4	-	2	-	6
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome	-	-	4	-	2	6
Using technology more effectively/Assistive technology	-	5	-	-	-	5
Working with the regular classroom teacher	-	2	-	3	-	5
School to work transitions	4	-	-	-	-	4
Learning disabilities (increase in number/severity)	-	2	2	-	-	4
Autism	-	3	-	-	-	3
Working with the visually impaired	-	-	-	3	-	3
Language development for the language impaired	-	2	-	-	-	2
Alternative strategies for students who don't work out in the regular classroom	-	2	-	-	-	2
Parent participation in IEPs	-	-	2	-	-	2
Working with the hearing impaired	-	-	-	2	-	2
Working with Traumatic Brain Injury	-	-	-	2	-	2
Working with paraprofessionals	-	-	-	2	-	2
School to Work transition	-	-	-	2	-	2
Handling students with multiple levels of ability in the same classroom	-	-	-	-	2	2

- An apparent training need is that of effectively working and coping with attention deficit children and those with other types of emotional and behavioral difficulties within the regular classroom

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Finding #5: *Teachers feel particularly unprepared to cope with the emotionally and behaviorally disturbed children which they are seeing with increasing frequency. In particular, this appears to be a source of frustration for regular classroom teachers trying to adequately serve diverse students in an inclusive environment.*

Several comments such as the following were heard regarding a perceived inability to adequately cope with behavioral and emotional problems.

> **One of the areas that I am going to need more knowledge about would be the discipline problems. A second area that I would be interested in is the changes in the special ed procedures in the state of Wyoming. There is this special ed reform going on and I am not sure what has changed if anything at all.**

> **I think the highest priority is specialized reading instruction for reading disabilities, we need to know new research on how to work with children with special reading problems. Second would be strategies and ways to serve children who have been diagnosed with ADHD or ADD because in our district we are seeing so many students being diagnosed with that and we need ways to help. The third thing would be ways to serve ED children in a more normalized environment instead of a resource or self-contained classroom.**

Associated with the aforementioned needs are accompanying resources in terms of accommodations and modifications that can be applied to help *all* students within the regular classroom. Teachers need to have a range of effective strategies at their fingertips so as to enhance their ability to effectively teach to diverse groups of learners. This would also assist them in helping those students who are more "marginal" and who perhaps do not qualify for special education.

> **Modifications in the classroom. How can you encourage the teachers to modify according to the IEP so you don't talk until you're blue in the face and say the child can't do it and they say well, he's still not meeting this criteria – they just don't adapt.**

> **I think as far as adaptations went, a lot of us felt that these take so much time and it is a big waste of time for one or two kids. Through the class we have learned how we can do that and make it a benefit for everybody, so that when I make up a test it doesn't just have to be for one or two kids. I can do it for the whole class and it benefits everybody. It is not going to be helpful to some and harmful to others. That was the most beneficial – to see how it would apply to everybody in the classroom.**

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I would say assistance for how regular classroom teachers can better serve more diverse groups of students in the regular classroom including special ed students. The reason I say that is that #1 historically, I have found that many teachers, if they detect the student struggling, their reaction is to refer them to special ed, get them to a resource room and out of the classroom. This is always the best solution, so I spend a lot of my time to get the students to stay or get back into the regular classroom, not every student, but I think that part of the problem is that regular classroom teachers aren't sure what to do with a student whose learning style doesn't match the rest of the pack. Where all the above average kids no longer exist these teachers are getting a lot more students. If they have half the class struggling they can't send half the class to the resource room although some of them would like to. We need more inservice on how to work with special education students in the regular classroom.

Notably, many teachers find the ED kids more difficult to deal with than other types of disabilities. Indeed, when asked which types of disabilities they were most and least comfortable serving, the population that teachers felt *most comfortable* with were LD students. By far the most prevalently cited disability category that teachers felt the *least comfortable* with were ED kids.

There is a general lack of classes or resources on dealing with students with emotional disabilities.

I would like to know more about working with emotionally disturbed kids. I don't like working with those kinds of kids and, I think part of it is just because I do not know how to deal with them effectively and that disturbs me.

Staff were also asked to rate how comfortable they were with a number of different topics pertaining to special education. Respondents were asked to rate these questions on a five point scale with one being Not At All Comfortable and five being Very Comfortable. Table 5 below displays the results from these questions.

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Table 5.
Please Rate How Comfortable You Are With . . . .

Statement	RATING SCALE Overall # of Respondents Rating it This Way				
	Least Comfortable 1	2	3	4	Most Comfortable 5
Teaching a wide range of *abilities* in a single classroom.	0	2	11	36	29
Working collaboratively with other groups in providing services to the disabled.	0	3	3	33	40
Working with students with *different* types of *disabilities*.	0	3	9	30	37
Effectively and successfully carrying out inclusion in the classroom.	2	5	16	33	21
Recognizing students with disabilities.	0	2	7	34	35
Utilizing different types of instructional strategies to adapt or modify the environment or instruction for students from special populations.	0	2	7	29	40
Monitoring student progress toward his/her IEP objectives.	0	3	9	34	33
Monitoring the progress of students with disabilities in meeting district performance standards.	2	9	25	26	16
Effectively utilizing assistive technology when appropriate.	0	6	27	30	14
Effectively managing behavior of students with disabilities in your classroom.	1	3	15	34	25
HS ONLY, arranging and preparing for the student's transition to exit high school.	2	2	8	5	8
ALL OTHERS, arranging and preparing for the student's transition to the next grade level.	0	3	4	36	30

- The five areas which teachers feel less comfortable with relative to others, include: 1) monitoring the performance of students with disabilities in meeting local performance standards; 2) effective utilization of assistive technology; 3) planning for transition of special education students from high school; 4) successfully carrying out inclusion; and 5) effectively managing student behavior.

Finding #6: *Typical boundaries between professional development for special education and professional development provided for regular educators need to be eradicated. The inclusive classroom necessitates that all staff (regular educators, special educators, teacher aides) be trained jointly. Such joint training will contribute to the success of inclusion, promote understanding and collaborative dialogue between service personnel, and help all teachers understand their roles and responsibilities in serving diverse groups of students.*

Almost all special educators expressed a desire that both regular education teachers and teacher aides also receive professional development that would assist them in serving special education students. They felt that things would go more smoothly if others had some background and familiarity with special education issues.

> **More is needed on emotionally disturbed students and maybe inclusion. With inclusion it would be really helpful if the regular educator was involved also because when we get the information and they don't it is really hard to work together.**

> **I think special ed people tend to go to those workshops on special needs students. I think we need to get more regular education teachers attending those kinds of workshops and I know it is difficult for them because of time, but they are seeing more and more of these students in their population and have to deal with them. So I as a special educator have to spend a great deal of my time trying to educate them once they already have the student rather than having them prepared for the student. I don't think the regular education teachers attend and part of it is the demand on their time because their responsibilities are becoming much more broad just like mine are, but I think it is in their best interest and the interest of the school district to educate them about these students. Plus they might start to see that some of the techniques that benefit special education also benefit regular students.**

Several teachers thought that the continuity and quality of services could be enhanced by sending teams of educators to trainings as opposed to single individuals.

> **Training would have to be something within the school settings because it isn't going to help for just one person to attend. I think the regular classroom teachers that's working with the special ed teacher need to sit down ahead of time with some training so that they understand why they're doing this, the relevancy of it. I don't think you can just train a special ed teacher totally on how to get along in that sort of circumstance. I think it would be helpful also for the mainstream teacher to be included in that training.**

> **Classroom management is a thing that our whole school is trying to implement and it is good when you are not the only teacher using it, it is much more workable when you have a whole team trained in it.**

Notably, many special educators find themselves in a role where they are trying to guide and educate the regular classroom teacher. In this role they offer much needed support and assistance while at the same time they must be careful not to be too intrusive, nor to appear like they are trying to "take over." The vast majority of special educators feel like

they have good, cooperative working relationships with their regular education teachers. However, a few noted that there exists a small handful of teachers who are resistant to inclusion and who are extremely reluctant to make any modifications to either their teaching style or their materials in order to accommodate a special education student.

> **The most frustrating thing for me is when they (special ed kids) are looked at as my job and not really a collaborative effort. That is the most frustrating thing to me.**
>
> **It is frustrating when you feel you are running into a brick wall, running into a teacher that just will not bend, that just draws the line if this child is reading at the 2nd grade level in my 5th grade reading class. That is frustrating when you can tell that, personally, they just don't see how it is going to work. Professionally, most people come around and attempt, they really do. But again our regular educators don't attend the special education professional development. They don't have it in their professional development I should say, they are not included in that. I have more educators at our school say to me, we should be at the workshops you are going to. Yes, it should be district wide because guess what? Those kids are in those classrooms and I struggle with that, we are making ourselves something different like we have some magic that those people couldn't possibly have and I don't think that is right at all.**

Typically, people like to do those tasks which they feel competent doing. Perhaps the reluctance on the part of some regular educators to work with special education students could be diminished by providing them with relevant training to help them perform those tasks. Perhaps joint training might contribute to an understanding and willingness on the part of reluctant regular educators to work with students in an inclusionary environment.

> **We have some teachers that won't work with our kids because they seem them as our kids not theirs. So teachers that have been here a long time see special education problems as our problem and it is kind of hard to get out of that way of thinking. Other teachers say "no, I won't take that student."**
>
> **With regards to regular classroom teachers in my building, I'd say the greater proportion are not willing participants of the inclusionary model.**
>
> **That you fit in to what they have going that the special ed – you don't rock the boat. There are maybe two or three exceptions where some teachers are very willing for you to come in and whatever adaptations you might want to use, they think that is great, let's use it for everybody, other teachers say, look these kids are in here and they are going to have to tow the line just like everybody else.**

However, there are some barriers to providing such professional development to regular education teachers. Notably, many of the regular education teachers interviewed in this study said that the special ed people go to all of "those types of trainings" and that they are often not even aware of trainings related to special education. If they are aware of a training, they may not think that they can go, that they are not welcome or invited. Whether this perception is true or not it does exist out there.

It would be nice if bulletins came directly to the people rather than the school. I'd just encourage them to spread the word around a little more. I didn't realize, but if there is a workshop that is special ed orientated I guess I didn't realize that we could even be considered to go. Just knowledge of what is available and who could go. I guess I've always assumed it would be special ed teachers only.

Our special ed people seem to go to a lot of things, but I don't know exactly what they are going to, but they are gone frequently.

In addition, the point was made that many regular classroom teachers are limited in the trainings they can attend or are understandably reluctant to be away from their classrooms too much. Thus, they must pick and choose which trainings they attend and there are many issues other than special education that are paramount in the minds of these educators.

Most of the ones who work with the students with disabilities, besides myself, are regular educators and, most of them, the types of trainings that they attend have to do with their own particular field of expertise (whether it is Math or English or something like that), so most of the time I don't think that they are able to attend many things having to do with students with disabilities.

It seems that, to the extent that teachers can see the relevance of trainings to their classrooms, they will attend. Thus, teachers must be shown how the techniques they learn can be useful in many situations and with many different types of students. It may even be advisable that future trainings not be billed strictly as *special education*.

Finally, it is important to note that respondents also emphasized that teacher aides play an integral role in the provision of special education services. Such a role is not restricted to photocopying and administrative activities, rather, many aides are providing 1:1 or small group instruction. In addition, many districts use them to shadow students in regular classrooms where these aides will often assist both students and teachers.

Their (teacher aides) lack of acknowledgment, lack of job descriptions, feeling as though they are a lowly person and they are not at all. They are providing services for students, making sure students are provided with services, they are a very integral part of our inclusion process here and they don't have training and that bothers me.

There was quite a bit of variation across the districts in this region in terms of training opportunities provided to teacher aides. Across all the districts, the special education teachers themselves do much of the training of aides. Almost all the special educators felt strongly that these aides should go to the same trainings that they do, however, only a minority of districts apparently send teacher aides to trainings along with special education personnel.

They need lots, almost the same kind of training or a lot of the training that a special education teacher needs – with the exception of testing, diagnosing or writing IEPs. They need training in collaboration in the classroom with the regular ed teacher. They need some training in background in how to deal with students with particular needs that they have. They need a lot of training they don't get. They also need a lot of money that they don't get.

Unfortunately, I can't remember ever having my support staff be invited to a training and they really do need to go to the same trainings that I do. Otherwise it is extra time for me. Extra effort to come back and train my staff in something I have learned so that sometimes I just don't do it. I might implement it myself individually as I work with students, but it would be so much easier and we would do so much better if support staff were also invited to participate so that they are learning the same things we are learning.

They (teacher aides) don't have any training, they are basically thrown in with the wolves.

***Finding #7**: Teachers want trainings to be located close by and need opportunities for follow-up.*

If you want to train groups of people as opposed to isolated individuals, training will need to be provided within a relatively close circumference of schools and districts. Indeed, the major factors that keep people away from professional development opportunities include time, distance, and a lack of qualified substitutes.

Location is an important consideration of whether I can make it. If it wouldn't take too much time out of my classroom, having it nearby. Anytime you take a class you want to weight whether you want to take away from classroom time and sometimes you don't know what is really going to be presented and that weights into your involvement.

The biggest thing is the time constraint. I would much rather be in my classroom than off at a conference or workshop somewhere.

It appears that attendance will positively correspond to how convenient the training is in terms of time and location. In general, teachers are quite averse to travel and being away from their classrooms. Something else that contributes to such reluctance to leave the classroom are high caseloads and also that some staff in more specialized positions find it difficult to find suitable substitutes while they are out of town.

When my caseload is too high I don't feel comfortable leaving my class. My caseload has been very high, mostly averaging around 25 students. One discouraging thing is that the district has set lids in regular education on the number of kids in the room, but there are not lids on special ed.

Because I am the only diagnostician and if I am gone too long there is no way for me to catch up. Sometimes people feel it is more of a bother to set up a substitute, so unless they are presented in our district on a day that you have to be there anyway.

All of the above suggests that local and regional approaches to professional development would enhance the likelihood of getting more staff to attend.

> **It depends on how far the training would be, how far would I have to travel. It would be nice if the programs could be brought to the district.**

> **The ones that are most regularly attended are probably the ones that have come to us. A day or some of them have been as long as three days —a seminar sort of thing that came to us. So that would be the most easy to get to and not have to rearrange one's whole life.**

One might also speculate that *follow-up* could be enhanced by providing trainings on a more local and/or regional basis and also by training groups of people from a given site.

> **Well, I don't know if I would say there was anything specific that I didn't like (about training provided). Maybe not having enough time for follow-up activities. Sometimes we get a lot of information and then that is it. I know when I went to the CEC convention when I got back there was never any discussion about it, we didn't share our good ideas. You couldn't go to every workshop and we never shared our ideas. If you did that on a building level it would be really good, or do some follow-up activities. But a lot of the things I did get I used in my classroom so I do think it was beneficial.**

What is often missing from professional development is any type of follow-up. Such *follow-up* could consist of a range of activities, including time for staff to discuss what they have learned with one another and periodic status reports during which staff visit with one another to discuss what they have tried and how it worked. Invariably this component is missing in the professional development programs provided by the *majority* of districts.

> **We will get together and make these wonderful plans and then there is never any follow through at the end.**

There are some districts however that prove to be exceptions.

> **One thing I liked best about the training is the fact that it was interactive. We were able to bring things that we were actually doing and work on those and get feedback. Through the inclusion training we met almost monthly with the consultants. We would talk about things that we had been doing and she would give us little assignments to try for the next month and then we would bring that back. You know, constant feedback rather than just a one day presentation.**

IV. Phase Two: Focus Groups with Special Education Administrators & Preschool Directors

Between November 1997 and January 1998, focus groups were held in each of the five WASEA regions, specifically Cheyenne, Gillette, Greybull, Kemmerer, and Riverton. A sixth focus group was also held in Cheyenne in January with Preschool Directors and related personnel involved in serving Pre-K children with disabilities. Attendance at these meetings averaged 87%). Thus, the data described in this section are based upon the feedback and candid responses of a substantial majority of the special education administrators currently working in Wyoming.

The length of the discussions ranged from 1 ½ hours to 3 hours (the average being approximately 2 hours), with the number participating ranging from 6 to 11 persons. An interview protocol was followed in order to assure that all topics of interest were covered (See Appendix A for a copy of the instrument). However, the interviews were also unstructured enough to permit the facilitator to delve into promising lines of inquiry that might not have been anticipated beforehand.

With the permission of participants, all focus groups were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Names of individuals were omitted from transcribed materials, thus any verbatim comments used in this report cannot be attributed to specific individual(s). In addition to taping the discussions, a CSI representative was present at all focus groups to take written notes. A separate facilitator, familiar with special education and not associated with a particular organization or government agency, was responsible for actually conducting the focus groups.

The subsequent section describes the information obtained from these focus groups, and highlights those findings that were similar across regions as well as those that varied across locations. However, the very consistency of the results, in terms of the similarities of concerns and views expressed throughout the state, is a noteworthy finding by itself. There was little variation across the regions in terms of the major themes that emerged although, there were some differences in the types of issues faced by small districts and large districts.

Finding #1: *The number of children exhibiting emotional and behavioral problems is on the rise. Concurrent with this increase is a blurring of lines or distinctions between at-risk children and special education children, accompanied by a lack of understanding as to who is responsible for servicing both types of children.*

An increasing number of students seem to be falling into a sort of "gray" area. These children are viewed as not "fitting" into the regular classroom either because they are: not up to grade level; exhibiting behavioral and/or emotional problems; or are just generally being disruptive.

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For those kids that are maybe marginal, don't quite qualify, those gray area kids and they are difficult they don't really belong there, they are not reading at the exact grade level so they are not our problem so you take them. It is almost like it is no longer O.K. for a kid to be a slow learner. You have to be either disabled or you are ok. We have a lot of kids in the IQ range of say 71 to 84, and those kids are going to have trouble in school and they always will and yet that is not ok anymore.

Here is an example and this really irritated me. We got a referral on a Native American kid, the kid entered school 9/16 and reached the BIT team on 9/22, they said he did not have any kindergarten experience and missed half of the first grade that he is behind and he is handicapped. Well no, he is not handicapped, what we are looking at is a lack of educational opportunities. Well, in this instance I thought the principal was going to call the police on me. This was a totally inappropriate referral, first of all, he didn't even give the kid a chance to learn the names of his classmates and you've got him referred to me for a full compressive.

The telephone interviews with teachers showed that the student population that teachers felt least equipped to deal with were the emotionally and behaviorally disordered children. This is supported by the focus group findings that, due to a lack of knowledge and/or alternative programs to effectively deal with at-risk[1] students, these students are often times inappropriately being referred to special education.

All those gray area kids that are causing regular education teachers a lot of problems and they are saying that this kid doesn't belong here so you take him or find a program for him.

Just the kids that are socially maladjusted that don't really fit into any category but they are here because DFS has brought them here to live with a foster family or something and they are causing havoc discipline wise, nobody knows what to do with them.

We have a lot of problems and we don't always have an envelope to put them in – you know most of these kids are not special ed, they are regular ed, but regular ed are saying how do you expect us to deal with them.

Special education personnel are feeling increasingly pressured to accept these "marginal", gray area, *at-risk* students into special education. The ramifications of this trend are substantial in terms of: 1) the quality and amount of services available to *qualified* special education students; and 2) increased caseloads and levels of stress among special educators.

I am not a very popular person right now because I have taken the hard line. I am not letting anymore of those kids who don't qualify into special ed classrooms. You guys take it, we are not going to do that anymore because we are tipping the scales and my special ed kids are being aversely affected by this. We are being given responsibilities that are technically not ours!

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[1] At-risk as used here may include a broad range of criteria including academically, behaviorally, socially etc.

When we look at what has been listed as special education it has become everything to all people, it is the general ed standards, its the general ed everything, its now special ed students, kids put out for disciplinary reasons, we are now responsible for 100% of every single thing. Special ed has taken a major shift.

There appears to be a lack of knowledge and/or resources in regular education to adequately and effectively serve these at-risk children. Thus, they are inappropriately being referred to special education or, perhaps worse, are not getting helped at all.

Like with those ADD/ADHD you have to qualify your special ed guidelines of course but then there are others who fall through the cracks. The slow learner without behavior problems and then also all the chronic disordered kids they don't qualify for any programs. The conduct disorder kids they don't qualify. So what happens to them. They drop out or, if the system has had enough of them, they are expelled.

There are arguably some very important reasons for maintaining stringent criteria for admittance in special education. Such criteria should serve the purpose of assuring that *all types of students* are being provided with *appropriate* services.

I think there is a very ethical basis for special ed and trying not to as it were contaminate what is truly a special ed child and who is not, what is happening is that there is becoming a larger and larger pool of kids who do not qualify for special ed services but who need specialized services, but there is no funding there.

They are equating at-risk and special ed and they are not and the definition for at-risk kids is very defined by the state law as economic, socially or academically at risk for failure. Special ed has categories that are very specific and exhaustive and they are not meant to be all inclusive and what they are doing is starting to merge those because at-risk is a major chunk of the accreditation process and they have no money to pay for it.

Finding #2: *Targeted training, activities, and resources need to be focused on providing at-risk students with suitable services and opportunities to succeed. Such activities would include providing* ***all*** *teachers with training on how to effectively deal with the "marginal" children. Expectations regarding roles in providing services to these children also have to be clearly articulated through preservice training, other training, policies, programs, etc.*

What types of services and settings are most beneficial to at-risk students? Funding, training and resources are needed to articulate a future for what will happen (or not happen) with these *gray area* students – for trends suggest that this is a need which is only going to become more pressing with time.

We are seeing more and more at-risk kids – not necessarily qualifying but at-risk. Also more behavioral in terms of emotional and ADHD students. Culturally at-risk, academically at-risk, behaviorally, all of those areas and how are we going to deal with them, they are not going away. Well, some of them do … they drop out.

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Or like she said, the conduct disorders the pure juvenile delinquent are not there, they are not special education, but you try to tell a principal who over the last two years has gotten two very poor kindergarten classes loaded with these conduct disorder kids and he wants to put them all in special ed.

What we are doing is perpetuating the problem of regular ed not developing programs for kids who are not achieving and wanting special ed to pick up everything.

There is not a school district in the state of WY that does not have in their policy book at-risk guidelines and at-risk referral forms and at-risk process and yet I bet there is maybe five districts in the state that use those.

Training needs to be provided so that teachers have a repertoire of techniques to draw upon when teaching to a diverse classroom that has many different types of learners. Such training should transcend typical special education/regular education boundaries – training as to how to effectively deal with unmotivated children with behavioral problems is needed for everybody!

Regular ed teachers need to learn more strategies to deal with the ED kids, that would take a lot of the load off us.

How do you deal with those kinds of kids in your classroom? One of those that crosses over into regular education that they are not prepared to deal with the behavior issues that are going on out there now. I think the number one issue where teachers are frustrated and not handling it very well, the behaviors of the kids.

I think the toughest kids for us to deal with are the general ed BD kids that are not IDEA identified, but we are looked at like "he is in our class, he's not learning and he is not qualified for IDEA. Kids are not coming in ready to learn in terms of listening skills, socialized behavior, etc.

I would say the greatest weakness in our staff would be how to service the at-risk kids educationally.

If they (regular educators) have to pay attention to a kid who is acting out, they are concerned that they will lose control of the rest of the class.

There also seems to be some confusion as to who should appropriately be serving both the at-risk children as well as the special education children. Several people noted that there needs to be a shift in thinking among teachers from "your child" and "my child" to "our child." The long-standing dichotomy between special education and regular education needs to be eradicated. This is reflected by the statements of a couple of administrators who said that when they hire, they are looking for dual certified teachers who are comfortable working with both special education and regular education students.

We are looking for staff that are elementary ed and special ed at the same time. This is what preservice needs to do. There is a separation of the two (regular and special ed) at the University also. UW needs to get with it in terms of the collaborative model.

Preservice training needs to expose teachers to all types of students and familiarize them with the inclusionary model. Only then will all regular educators understand fully their roles in providing quality education to all students.

Yeah, I have teachers that don't have a problem having a multiply disabled child in their classroom, just take care of that conduct kid. Trade you three to one – they are more willing to deal with a more physically or mentally disabled child.

We also need to train the regular ed staff to deal with some of these problems. They are not all LD or SED, we are kind of getting black balled and I feel that special ed is being looked at like we are not doing our jobs if we don't qualify them. Even when we try to approach them (regular ed teachers) and say but we know that they learn this way, these are their strengths, these are their weaknesses, this is what would probably work if you give it a shot in the regular classroom. The regular ed teachers just throw up their hands and say why don't you just take them.

They (regular ed) need to be willing to work with kids that are not in the normal to above average zone.

Although there are many regular educators who are willing to work with different types of students and accept their dual responsibilities in educational service structures, in the teacher interviews also, many people noted that there are "some teachers who will take your kids and many who won't."

They are the walking time bombs and people are reluctant to deal with that and don't want them a) in their class or b) in their school. They don't want them because they are disruptive, because they take away from the learning of the other children, they don't feel like they can adequately deal with that in their classroom. And administrators are reluctant to have them in their building because their options for discipline are limited and they feel a little gun shy and how am I able to deal the this appropriately and have the freedom to do what I feel I need to for the other kids.

My teacher aides say if they could get regular ed teachers to learn some of the strategies and concepts that we have, they would have fewer problems and fewer referrals into special ed. But it is very hard to get those individuals to attend those types of trainings because they sort of believe that this is a special ed issue and not a regular ed issue. It is like it is your kids not my kids – you need them over in special ed.

Interestingly enough, a few regular education teachers who participated in the teacher interviews suggested that, oftentimes they either weren't made aware of "special education" trainings or, if they were aware, did not think that they were welcome or allowed to attend. Thus, future trainings should not be specifically billed towards a particular group of individuals – billing trainings to a specific group almost reinforces the

traditional dichotomy between special educators and regular educators and is almost counterintuitive with the inclusion model. Also, the topics could be phrased so that they are more generic and likely to generate participation from *all* types of staff. Examples of generically billed trainings could include:

- How to motivate the unmotivated
- How to effectively deal with behaviorally disruptive students
- What to do with at-risk kids who don't quite fit into special ed or regular classroom
- The role of special ed and regular ed in working with the BD/ED kid
- Disruptive students: How to develop a behavioral intervention plan
- And so on ....

Phrasing topics in a way that does not specifically bill them to one group or another should encourage both to attend.

Finding #3: *Professional development activities need to become more decentralized in that they need to be offered more frequently either locally within districts or within a relatively close proximity of schools districts.*

In addition, the fact that professional development needs to include both regular educators and special educators suggests a different *structure* to trainings being offered. Specifically, in order to allow for groups of people to participate from a given school, trainings will either need to be held on-site or at least be centrally located within a region so that it is no farther away than a two hour drive or so.

> **If they bring in trainings they need to put them out in the corners of the state more. even a meeting in Casper becomes an overnight stay – a one day meeting becomes three. We need to have trainings centrally located with in the regions.**
>
> **We try to bring them in because it is a lot cheaper I think in the long run to try and bring them in and then your entire staff would be able to watch, listen and question and you can talk about a kid and they can all relate to a child and I think that seems to be a lot more productive.**

We found in both the teacher interviews and in our discussions with administrators that, if we want professional development to be *ongoing* (e.g., more than once or twice a year), it becomes a real hardship to require that people travel long distances to be able to attend.

> **A barrier is getting some of the regular ed teachers released. (or they are unwilling to be released if it is to go to a "special ed" conference).**
>
> **Lets just be truthful about it, subs are not subs they are there to basically babysit and for a lot of our special ed programs that is all that happens.**

One of the things, we are burning our people out. My teachers say please don't ask us to go to anything, it is hard work to prepare to leave my classroom to come and do what you are asking me to do. We are not helping our folks. We are adding stresses when we ask them to come. They know they need to know this, but they are also tied to what is happening with their children and also what is happening with preparing to leave is harder work than.

Although some teachers felt it was helpful to get out once in awhile just to network among other professionals and to know they were "staying current", most were averse to leaving their classroom frequently or for extended periods of time. In addition, especially for administrators, such practical considerations as providing release time and finding qualified substitutes often becomes problematic.

And you have the problem of funding in the same issue. That if you are going to bring both special and regular ed staff in, we do get support for paying teachers to go, but every time I take a teacher out of the classroom and I hire a substitute, I get not one bit of support from the state for that substitute. And there is a certain amount of 6b money that I can use for that but there is a limit for that as well, so if I need a teacher for 10 days a year for some really excellent training with them, I have 10 days of sub costs that have to come out of the districts funding or some portion of that because I may not have enough 6b money to support it. I would like to suggest that while the legislature doesn't reduce the special ed support to the State of Wyoming but it could also increase it to include supporting the cost of substitutes.

I get a lot of flak for that and real resistance because I think that basically we don't believe when we take teachers out of school that it is doing them any good that they are better off staying in the classroom.

Notably, providing training opportunities within a closer proximity might also increase the likelihood of *parental* participation in such opportunities. Unsurprisingly, the increase in the number of at-risk children has been accompanied by a perception by educators that parenting issues (in terms of consistency, understanding, and general parenting skills) also need to be addressed. It is important to note however, that due to limits in both time and resources, this year's CSPD needs assessment process did not collect data directly from parents. Future needs assessments will need to collect information directly from parents. At that point, it will be interesting to compare the views of both parents and educators in terms of the perceived training needs for both.

We are also having some trouble with parents not supporting the system. So teachers both regular and special ed are having to deal with parents.

I would say dysfunctional families cause most of our problems with kids.

All of this talks to parental participation and training as well. Parenting skills.

Finding #4: *Alternative forms of professional development (other than one-shot inservices) hold great promise in terms of promoting follow-up and actual utilization of what is learned. Although these may appear to be expensive initially, research and experience suggests that they may well be more cost effective in the long run. Such alternative, ongoing forms of professional development include: having resident experts or trainers, mentors, job shadowing and specifically allocating time for discussion among teachers.*

As well as bringing professional development opportunities into the corners of the state (not just to Casper or Cheyenne), another option suggested by several persons included "training the trainer" types of models. Many felt that such models were both functional and effective, citing that people appear to be highly receptive to "expertise from within" (the school, district or region).

> **We get the most positive responses to the ones from within. Those done by the teachers themselves were the best praised – so I think we value our own expertise.**
>
> **If you want long lasting effective professional development you'll cast it in a intra staff development of your own folks working with your own folks that will be long lasting, that is the only way it will be long lasting. You have to do it in house – resident experts.**

Current research on professional development supports the notion that *follow-up* is absolutely necessary for professional development to have any sort of effect. Intuitively and through prior experience both teachers and administrators knew this.

> **It (staff development) has to be small groups and it has to be in house and it has to be constantly supported and revisited.**
>
> **Those one shot inservices do not give us much value. All of us learn better when we get exposure to something more than once – we need follow-up.**

Unfortunately, although people are aware that follow-up is necessary, within the present structure of professional development follow-up occurs infrequently -- if at all.

> **In my observations, staff development a lot of times has been like artificial insemination. You get a little there and then you wait nine months for it to take. There is no pleasure in it – I'm trying to be professional. It is a one shot deal and we wait nine months to see if there is any good. And there needs to be some follow-up to it. There needs to be somebody coming in a day or two, coming out to our buildings, seeing real life kids, real life teachers having little work sessions. Let's get back together in four or five weeks and tell me how tell me how it went. I'll give you some insights. That doesn't happen.**
>
> **Sure and we have all been part of it, we even offered some one shot deals and they are really good and you take away stuff, but I have always wondered wouldn't it have been nice to have that person come back and, two or three months later, say now how are things going, what can I help you with now. Love to see something like that.**

However, some localities are beginning to utilize alternative forms of staff development (other than one shot inservices). Although at first, such forms of training might appear to be more expensive, these districts are often finding them to be more *cost effective* in the long run.

> **One on one shadowing has been the most successful type of staff development for me. It is like the Nordstrom model, they bring in people and pair them up with whoever is really good and on the job, very much a mentoring program that is highly intensive. We do that with our new staff and parents and that is where we have the most success. What is good about that process is we get out the slackers and the people who just don't quite have the skills, they are like WOW get me out of here, and that is good because they don't waste our time or theirs. But it is labor intensive and costs a lot of money up front -- but in the long run we find it to be the most efficient model.**

A final comment on the types of trainings that need to be offered is that respondents, especially teachers, noted that they wanted to be exposed to practical, hands on types of ideas and techniques that they could take home and use tomorrow in the classroom. Several participants noted that they had really enjoyed the Jim Faye, Boys Town, and Love and Logic trainings due to the practicality of such trainings and the fact that they could take what they learned and use it in the classroom tomorrow.

Finding #5: *Local districts are having to serve students with more severe, low incidence types of disabilities. Smaller districts are finding this to be particularly taxing in terms of existing knowledge, resources, and staff. Especially in smaller districts, special education staff are having to take on multiple, diverse responsibilities, stress levels are high and some are moving over to regular education.*

With inclusive practices becoming more widespread, districts are serving students that previously would have been sent elsewhere. *Inclusion* needs to be accompanied by adequate staffing, resources and preparation of personnel so that people are not so taxed that they leave the field of special education.

> **I can tell you that our special education population has increased 2% a year for the last three years. I now have over 16% of our student population identified, most of them transient and the ones that are coming are more severe than the kids we have had before – more unique disabilities.**
>
> **Somewhere we have got to go back to something where reality of the numbers and the case management has to be manageable and it has to be that those folks can do the adequate teaching and the job. Right now we are a band-aid.**
>
> **Several low incidence disabilities are coming in– medically fragile, more severely involved kids that have intense service needs. Low incidence syndromes puts a real stress on our existing staff when those kids come in it is very stressful.**

Although this trend is occurring all over, it appears to be more of an issue for smaller districts, who oftentimes might only have one special education teacher in a building and

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little access to full-time specialized staff (e.g., occupational therapists, physical therapists, etc.)

> **We are trying to get more least restrictive environments and get to keep the kids in district who would never have been there before and they are your low incidence kids and we are not set up for that. What do you do when you have one special education teacher at the elementary level? We have a Down Syndrome, a fetal alcohol child and we are still having to serve all the other "normal" special ed students.**
>
> **Now the problem with that is that every single person sitting at this table will have four, five to seven other responsibilities that in larger districts would be filled by a full time person and we are supposed to be doing one hell of a job with all of these.**
>
> **The stress is so great when you are one teacher trying to do 14 jobs and you don't have any support and -- I mean you can't laugh.**
>
> **I think part of the reason staff are leaving the smaller districts is that they have to wear so many hats. – that is an advantage of being in a bigger school like in Cheyenne they have their 14 psychologists and these people can get together and talk and share and those kinds of things make a difference.**

It appears that wearing such multiple hats contributes to attrition. Staff are moving to other areas where life is less stressful.

> **Attrition is definitely a concern. I probably have close to 50% of special ed staff every year who makes a written request transferring to regular education. Burnout & stress is an issue. What can we do just to keep the staff that we have? They are disappearing taking better jobs, selling real estate and that type of thing. I am looking for ways to help my veteran staff members acquire the new skills that they need to meet these new challenges. So anything that I can do to help somebody who has been on board for 10 to 15 years, stay sharp and stay enthused and at a minimum think they can survive. So that they will stay – give them more knowledge, more ability to meet the demands.**

Finding #6: *A lack of competitiveness in pay has contributed to attrition and difficulties in recruiting people. Specifically, there is a shortage of qualified certified personnel to fill special education vacancies, this is particularly true for: 1) more specialized fields such as OT, PT, etc.; and 2) smaller, more rural districts.*

A component of CSPD is to gather data pertinent to the supply/demand of special education personnel in Wyoming. Especially in schools located in more rural settings, there seems to be a trend where demand is exceeding supply. Several administrators in smaller districts noted that: 1) when they did have vacancies they had a shortage of qualified applicants from which to base their selections; 2) oftentimes positions remain unfilled -- which creates additional burdens for existing staff; 3) if they do not know of a vacancy by a certain time of year (e.g., May 1st) it is extremely difficult to fill it since the existing pool of qualified applicants have already been employed; and 4) specialized positions such as OT, PT, psychologists, etc. are particularly difficult to fill. In fact, on

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more than one occasion we heard people in these specialized fields referred to as the "low incidence professionals."

I have 13 kids with hearing impairments. I could not find a deaf ed person, I don't have an OT or a PT person on staff. We are finding that our special ed staff are having to take on roles they haven't been trained in because we cannot get the specialists to fill in the gap – until they are so stressed out that they cry out "uncle" because this is so far removed from anything they have been trained to do.

I would put it to lack of funding, lack of available staff and qualified candidates and then the certification issue. Especially those groups such as Speech/Language, PT, occupational therapists – those are really hard to fill.

If you don't know about the vacancies on May 1st it is very difficult to fill it.

The major reason cited for all of the above is that the competitiveness of salaries offered in Wyoming has sharply decreased relative to other parts of the nation and relative to other service sectors. People are either moving to areas where there is better compensation or easier working conditions.

We also have quite a high turnover in paraprofessionals. They are making more money at the local grocery store and don't have to put up with the guff of the kids that are emotionally disturbed – it is very, very difficult.

A few years ago we used to be in the top ten on the pay scale, we are down on the bottom ten of the pay scale now and the law requires more and more of related specialty services for some of our students and those are specialists and to bring them in on a beginning teachers salary does not work – it doesn't happen. Especially when you are competing with outside business and that whole market out there for like OT and PT staff.

Speech pathologists, PT, OT and what we have done in the past is we have educated those folks, we pay for their college and they come and do their three years and leave – then they move into a hospital and make 100 thousand a year.

I will use myself as an example. In the last four years I have spent $12,000 on graduate work and I have not had a raise in four years, salaries have been frozen and people are taking their own money. UW units aren't cheap. Well, of course they want to grow professionally, but there also needs to be a positive side to this financially and it doesn't happen. So you about just have to bribe people to get them to participate, otherwise they'll go to the bookstore and buy a $20 book and read something themselves.

There is also a perception out there that, in many instances, there is an unwillingness on the part of the Professional Teaching Standards Board and the University of Wyoming (UW) to help make continuing education and certification feasible.

It is extremely difficult to find qualified people. We are not longer competitive in Wyoming and we have to jump through a bunch of hoops for the professional teaching standards board. There is no attempt to make that proces.. easy.

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Finding #7: *Perceptions of both teachers and administrators suggest that there are several areas of improvement needed in preservice and continuing education offered by UW. Specifically, the data suggests that: 1) teachers are not coming out with all the necessary skills; 2) local districts are oftentimes going out of state to recruit teachers; and 3) the UW is perceived as unwilling to work with local districts in helping them provide continuing education credit and meet certification requirements.*

As noted earlier, teachers who had received their training at UW felt that they hadn't had enough hands-on training and had not been given adequate exposure to different types of students while actually working in the classroom. They had to pick up the skills to work with diverse groups of students while actually on the job – either from more, experienced teachers or by trial and error. In addition, several participants in the focus groups noted that new teachers needed to be more familiar with the IEP process, the collaborative model, and behavioral plans. In addition, administrators are looking to hire staff with some background in technology and who are either dual certified or, at the very least, have had some experience working with both regular ed and special ed students.

> **What the new teachers don't have – they don't know about effective teaching strategies. They don't know what those are and how and if they have been trained in one, they don't have any more in their tool kit to pull from when they get three strange kids in their room they are going to say what. How do you teach to a kid who can't do it the way that I teach it.**
>
> **I wish they could do behavioral plans.**
>
> **They need to have collaborative skills – being a person able to collaborate with peers. I am not the boss, you are not my boss but it is our responsibility together to plan for this child. We have a lot of problems personnel wise that way on what that is and who is going to do what, etc.**
>
> **New teachers are unprepared in the multiple disabilities – they need to be generalists. Things like writing a behavior plan, it's like where do I start, where do I go.**
>
> **Understanding the new rules and regs, new forms, functional behavior plans, design and development of behavior intervention plans period. This is a real problem for not only regular ed but special ed teachers. When I have a request to work with a ED kid or a BD kid my first response is well, have you developed a behavior intervention plan and invariably I get something back like WHAT!**
>
> **Some technology background is helpful.**
>
> **In regards to preservice, they need to understand the IEP process. Know how to do behavioral plans (BIT).**
>
> **They are not equipped to write training programs and explain those programs to lets say Head Start staff or people not even associated with our program, they are not equipped to write IEPs and they most certainly do not have a clue about what Medicaid billing is.** – *Preschool focus group*

In general, people felt that the major institution for higher learning in this state (UW) is not staying current with what is needed in the field.

> **Preservice is poor. General knowledge of the law is poor, processes, poor.**
>
> **But I don't see the preservice organizations doing any better training or changing their training to really meet the current needs that we have.**
>
> **I am amazed at what the new grads do not know. It is like there ought to be a fifth year and it ought to be an extended internship. They need another hour in the oven.**
>
> **We have a 33 year old daughter that has just graduated with a bachelors degree from UW in speech therapy and of course we all recognize that she can't go to work until she finishes her Masters degree and she knows that too. But she was asked whether she would like to come to a region as a speech therapy aide just as she prepares to get into this graduate program. Her response is I don't know anything about speech therapy what on earth would I possibly do? And she is real serious about this and we are talking about an older person with a child of her own that has speech problems and just being scared to death as an individual about going out and facing the world and being a speech therapist.**

It was also a noteworthy, and disappointing, finding that many people in the local districts did not feel as if they could go to the UW to recruit the caliber of staff that they needed.

> **We have about 2 or 3 colleges (Billings, Black Hills, Colorado) that we hire out of because they get better preparation than others.**
>
> **In terms of the characteristics of the good programs we go to – most of them teach direct instructional models. They provide dual degrees so that teachers they have been in the classroom and they also have special ed experience.**
>
> **I go to UNC (to hire people).**
>
> **MSU and Billings are better for us and that is because the Montana Center for the Disabled is on campus and those kids all work with all varieties of disabilities ranging in severity. They experience actual situations.**

Many respondents felt the UW to be unsupportive in helping them obtain the additional training and/or credits they needed for staff to meet ongoing certification requirements. Illustrating this point, the moderator in one of the focus groups asked the group "where does the UW fit into this?" five respondents in the room all said "they don't" and that "they haven't done a thing for us."

> **Our location is a big problem because of continuing education, once you have your degree there is not a lot of opportunities to go on here where we are located and unfortunately the university has not been real willing to work with us in providing classes here, so this means you go somewhere else or you go out of state when you have time to go, there is not a lot of opportunity for advanced degrees.**

We have offered some workshops or inservices however, we have had to go out of state to get graduate credit rather than through our own university. It is easier to work with out of state universities frequently than to work with our own university. That ought not to happen.

Notably, however, although the reputation of the UW among school districts could stand some improvement, this can also be said for the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE).

Finding #8: *There is quite a bit of frustration among school districts with the WDE, in part due to: 1) changeover in personnel responsible for programs; 2) a perception that the WDE exists not to help but merely to enforce; and 3) a perceived lack of guidance and articulation in regards to policies.*

Due to turnover in personnel responsible for certain programs, including special education, people have become reluctant to call the WDE for help because they may not be sure who they need to talk to or they get mixed messages from the different people they do talk to. Also, whether it is true or not, the WDE is often viewed more as a policing body than as a central source for resources and assistance.

With all the turnover at the WDE it really leaves us in a lurch so we don't call the WDE as frequently as well call our neighboring special education directors.

There is no central way to get information.

There is a compliance and monitoring stigma that is really attached to them (the WDE), that they are not there to help us, they should be there to facilitate what we want to do and remove barriers so we can provide education to kids. There is too much separation between state and district right now and not enough trust.

Furthermore, there is truly some confusion on the part of districts as to how to meet some of the requirements and guidelines set by the WDE. Two examples of this that were cited included: 1) how performance standards and measures are to be translated into the IEP process; and 2) how to merge professional development needs for special education into the consolidated grant process.

How can you convert standards at each level into IEPs?

Through the consolidated grant we had to identify some common areas that we were going to address in our district and then these other things come up and do not necessarily fit in with the common areas so how do you fund it? So as the timeline draws near to turn in those consolidated grants I am going to put a miscellaneous category in there to somehow account for the other things that come up but that don't necessarily tie into the district's main area of focus.

The school improvement plan is actually a barrier to flexibility.

The consolidated grant process is sort of impeding because you have to tie those to school improvement plans which is sort of a barrier when you have to also be able to situationally deal with your needs. You want the ability to say tomorrow I need to do this versus boy I don't want to be penalized because I have this need today and it is not on my school improvement plan.

Most people understood the rationale behind the requirement that staff development be subsumed under broader goals and rationale so as to avoid a haphazard approach to such development however, does this preclude ever dealing with professional development needs on a situational basis? This question was posed by several administrators and seems especially relevant to special education, where needs may literally change overnight if a student enters the district with a disability with which they have limited or no experience. Perhaps clearer articulation is needed on how special education and regular education needs are to fit together. Notably, the following statement was heard from only two districts:

We have integrated special education staff development with re[illegible]r education staff development to a certain extent.

Finding #9: *Due to the swift changes that can occur in student populations and concurrent changes in professional development needs for staff expected to serve those students, future needs assessment activities should be designed so as to enhance sensitivity and flexibility.*

Although as noted earlier in this report, the smaller districts in particular, seem to need less help with the broad categories and more help with the real specific, unique disabilities; such needs change swiftly and oftentimes cannot be anticipated far in advance. It literally depends on who comes into their district – which can change overnight. In light of this, many respondents noted that: 1) the funding structure for professional development needs to permit a certain degree of flexibility and accessibility so as to have funds available to meet needs as they are identified; and 2) perhaps the method in which CSPD needs assessments have been conducted in the past is incompatible with the nature of what is being studied

Another piece of this is sometimes it changes, literally from day to day, based on students who move in or move out.

If we get a kid with special needs, I need to get support for that staff right away and I need to have my 6B staff development money available.

It seems like you create a school improvement plan that deals with things identified through the various processes, and then all of a sudden on September 2nd a child with autism comes in your building and you have to throw all that other stuff away and be more specific to a particular child. Also, just because we have an autistic kid doesn't mean we should spend our entire 6b money on autism, because 6 months from now that autistic child may leave and while we very well need to provide services for that child, I do not think we are unique in that we have a transient

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population. A lot of times the kids that come and go are our very needy children and the ones that are multi-handicapped, and so, although it may be a direct need for right now it may be another 6 years before we have to have that expertise again and then the people we train are gone as well as the child and then we have to start all over again.

Furthermore, people expressed doubt that the once a year survey process that, historically has been the CSPD needs assessment prior to 1997-1998, would ever be sensitive enough to detect the rapidly changing needs so characteristic of special education environments. Given the rapidity with which needs can change, perhaps the future structure of data collection for CSPD needs to include a more locally driven component, where data collection can be ongoing and in-depth.

A big problem with a once a year survey is that our needs change, one year we had a deaf student come in and we kicked in sign language training for some of the teachers and that was item specific, time specific and that was the most important thing at that time. And tomorrow I could have a different type of child and a different need like that.

What people thought was wrong with the process before is that you cannot wait for somebody from the outside to get your own perceptions and results back to you.

What happens when you do these small samples and then make generalizations is that most of us have multi-categories of people, we don't have an autistic special ed. we don't have a teacher for the hearing impaired, they are multi-categorical so if you survey one person and the current issue is that they heard there is an autistic kid coming in, you are going to get this strong need from our district for training in autism for everybody and it actually misrepresents what perhaps the district needs as a whole. So if you don't have that local flavor in there via a broader sampling you get a real distorted picture of what a district needs.

An example is that we had a kid come in with autism so we sent staff to trainings, subscribed to all sorts of things. Well, that teacher still feels like she needs more information and so when you survey her she still says we need more autism, well, there needs to be a line. Yet that still is reflecting of the last survey we got back and said we needed to do more in autism, well, we spent $15,000 or something of our 6b money on autism – it just reaches a point of ridiculousness.

It should be noted that, at the end of all telephone interviews and focus groups, respondents were asked whether they would be willing to review a survey instrument that would be developed as a result of this study. The most prevalent response to this question was that they didn't want to go back to written surveys, that they preferred discussion types of format such as those undertaken for the first time during the 1997-98 CSPD needs assessment.

I would throw away the idea that you are going to get a written survey that is going to measure the kinds of things that you are looking for. I think it necessarily implies just what you did this year, you could even do it every third year, talk with people via phone and then get out to these people.

I guess I would start off by saying I think we tend to get the same thing over and over in terms of information back, and I did not find the information coming back to be useful because it was multiple choice and you have to select from the things that were on there and you always felt compelled to pick one of them and so what we ended up getting is recurring themes year after year. This change in method has been positive because it allows people to probe at a deeper level.

Notably, many districts indicated that they have mechanisms in place internally for finding out their own professional development needs. Thus, in many localities there are informal needs assessments already taking place.

We don't use it (the CSPD results provided to them in the past), we do our own.

When we did our teacher evaluations, I discussed with them individually where we thought we should spend training this coming year. —uses the staff evaluation/supervision model to help identify target development areas.

I think the question that they are asking is that 5B grant money requires that you do some sort of assessment at the local level to determine needs and how could we report that if we talked to people and say I think it would be very simple if we just came up with some sort of a form. You know like in my building it is all based on discussion and documented meetings and if it requires I could have them write me a memo requesting something and attach it to something, but trying to make it more building specific.

V. Generalizability of Findings

The findings presented above were found consistently across the different regions in the State. As noted in the text of this report, some of the findings were more specific to localities depending on their size and location -- with smaller, rural districts facing some unique challenges.

In addition to the above, the discussions with preschool directors suggests that there are some additional findings unique to preschool settings. Specifically, the structure of preschools differ from that of elementary and secondary education in that: 1) they are more likely to provide services on a year-basis; and 2) their responsibilities include more of an emphasis on outreach and training than other types of settings. As such, we found that stress and time management is a major issue for preschools – although interesting enough, attrition is not as much of an issue for preschools as it seems to be for the higher grade levels (except for teacher aides, perhaps). Preschools are also seeing a rise in behavioral types of problems as well as a increase in severity which is a noteworthy trend for the elementary and secondary teachers who will eventually be seeing these same kids. In addition, rural service delivery is an issue for preschool in that they have limited staff who are trying to provide services to kids who live across a wide geographical area. Thus, transportation is a big issue as well as the fact that preschool staff need to be particularly adept at working and training other people, especially parents. In view of this preschool staff are also assuming multiple roles including social worker, nurse, etc.

Preschools are feeling a big crunch financially and also expressed a need for more background in authentic assessment – which they may not be getting as much exposure to as are teachers in the higher grade levels

Below are some of quotes from the Preschool focus group

There is almost no way that you can be prepared for with a body of knowledge for all of the unusual kinds of conditions that we are seeing.

We are trying to figure out a way that a staff of x amount of people who live all over the place to provide the services those kids need. Transportation is a big issue.

We are seeing more severe – especially in the birth through 3 populations.

Populations are changing radically with very intense needs which includes behavior which includes the family dynamics.

We are getting more and more children and the funding isn't keeping up with it.

It is not just being a good therapist but also being able to work with people.

Family focus is a real necessity.

Finally, the preschool group also noted a lack of preservice preparation as being an issue, also noting that incoming staff were not prepared to do much of the necessary paperwork including Medicaid billing.

VI. Summary & Recommendations

Table 6 and Figure 1 below displays the findings from Phase One and Phase Two of this study. Arrows have been inserted in Figure 1 to signify which findings show considerable overlap between the two phases. This table and figure clearly show that, as well as there being considerable overlap in issues identified across various regions in the state, there is also considerable agreement between teachers and administrators in terms of perceived issues and areas of need for special education in Wyoming.

Table 6.
Summary of Findings
Phase One & Phase Two

Phase One: Teacher Interviews	Phase Two: Focus Groups with Administrators
Finding #1: In terms of overall trends, there is an increase in the number of students being brought into special education, and a relatively higher proportion of these students are demonstrating attention, emotional and behavioral types of disorders.	*Finding #1: The number of children exhibiting emotional and behavioral problems is on the rise. Concurrent with this increase is a blurring of lines or distinctions between at-risk children and special education children, accompanied by a lack of understanding as to who is responsible for servicing both types of children.*
Finding #2: Teachers want training which is focused, practical, and hands-on. Similarly, they felt that preservice should also provide more hands-on types of training opportunities.	*Finding #2: Targeted training, activities, and resources need to be focused on providing at-risk students with suitable services and opportunities to succeed. Such activities would include providing all teachers with training on how to effectively deal with the "marginal" children. Expectations regarding roles in providing services to these children also needs to be clearly articulated through preservice training, other training, policies, programs, etc.*
Finding #3: Teachers appear to be receptive to expertise provided from fellow teachers and others who have actually been in the classroom. In general, they find the expertise of their peers to be invaluable in helping them serve their students. However, time remains the primary barrier to the sharing among professionals which teachers find to be so important.	*Finding #3: Professional development activities need to become more decentralized in that they need to be offered more frequently either locally within districts or within relatively close proximity of schools districts.*
Finding #4: Oftentimes, teachers find ongoing, informal types of professional development activities to be the most useful in terms of helping them effectively fulfill their day-to-day responsibilities. Such alternative forms of professional development includes: 1) time for collaboration, informal discussions, and sharing of resources among teachers; 2) mentoring and/or job shadowing types of arrangements; and 3) visiting other programs and service provision settings.	*Finding #4: Alternative forms of professional development (other than one-shot inservices) hold great promise in terms of promoting follow-up and actual utilization of what is learned. Although these may appear to be expensive initially, research and experience suggests that they may well be more cost effective in the long run. Such alternative, ongoing forms of professional development include: having resident experts or trainers, mentors, job shadowing and specifically allocating time for discussion among teachers.*
Finding #5: Teachers feel particularly unprepared to cope with the emotionally and behaviorally disturbed children which they are seeing with increasing frequency. In particular, this appears to be a source of frustration for regular classroom teachers trying to adequately serve diverse students in an inclusive atmosphere.	*Finding #5: Local districts are having to serve students with more severe, low incidence types of disabilities. Smaller districts are finding this to be particularly taxing in terms of existing knowledge, resources, and staff. Especially in smaller districts, special education staff are having to take on multiple, diverse responsibilities, stress levels are high and some are moving over to regular education.*
Finding #6: Typical boundaries between professional development for special education and professional development provided for regular educators need to be eradicated. The inclusive classroom necessitates that all staff (regular educators, special educators, teacher aides) be trained jointly. Such joint training will contribute to the success of inclusion, promote understanding and collaborative dialogue between service personnel, and help all teachers understand their roles and responsibilities in serving diverse groups of students.	*Finding # 6: A lack of competitiveness in pay has contributed to attrition and difficulties in recruiting people. Specifically, there is a shortage of qualified certified personnel to fill special education vacancies, this is particularly true for: 1) more specialized fields such as OT, PT, etc.; and 2) smaller, more rural districts.*
Finding #7: Teachers want trainings to be located close by and need opportunities for follow up.	*Finding #7: Perceptions of both teachers and administrators suggest that there are several areas of improvement needed for both preservice and continuing education offered by UW. Specifically, the data suggests that: 1) teachers are not graduating with all the necessary skills; 2) local districts are oftentimes going out of state to recruit teachers; and 3) the UW is perceived as unwilling to work with local districts in helping them provide continuing education credit and meet certification requirements.*
	Finding #8: There is quite a bit of frustration among school districts with the WDE, in part due to: 1) changeover in personnel responsible for programs; 2) a perception that the WDE is not there to help but merely to enforce; and 3) a perceived lack of guidance and articulation in regards to policies.
	Finding #9: Due to the swift changes that can occur in student populations and concurrent changes in professional development needs for staff expected to serve those students, future needs assessment activities should be designed so as to enhance sensitivity and flexibility.

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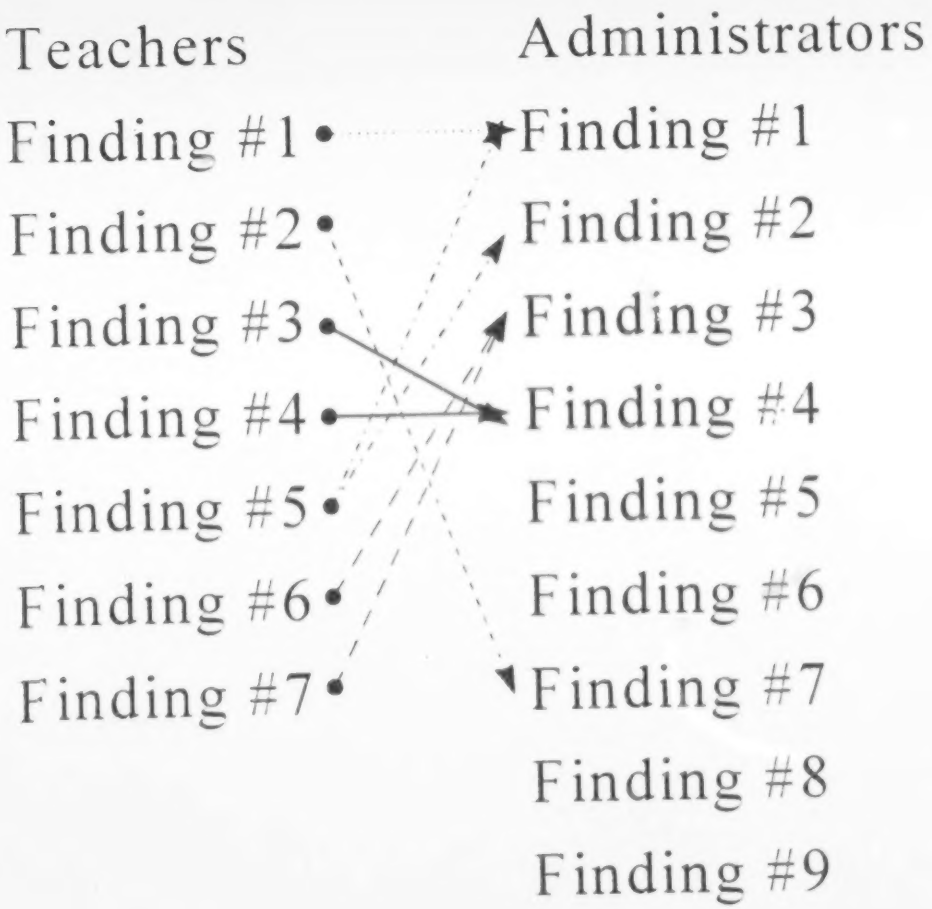
Figure 1: Overlap between Phase 1 and Phase 2 Findings



The above findings suggest several recommendations which could help improve professional development opportunities for personnel working with students with disabilities; better prepare and equip educators with the skills necessary to serve special education students and ultimately, improve the services provided to those students.

First, *all* teachers need to be provided with professional development opportunities (both ongoing and during preservice) to better prepare them to effectively teach to and manage the behavior of BD and ED children. Especially for regular educators and administrators, such training should also address: 1) the broader issues and rationale associated with the inclusionary model, including clarification of expectations regarding the roles of different individuals (e.g., regular educators, special educators, teacher aides, etc.) in providing services to special education students; and 2) appropriate identification and referral of students to special education. There appears to be a trend of "over-referrals" of students who, for some reason or another, do not quite fit the profile of the "typical student" within a regular education classroom. Although part of this trend might be attributable to a lack

of understanding among educators as to their roles in providing services to students who vary significantly in ability levels, there are certainly some gray areas in which it is difficult to discern between students who are at-risk behaviorally, emotionally, or academically and those who qualify for special education. Regular education teachers and administrators need to be given guidance as to what types of situations make for appropriate and inappropriate referrals – and such training cannot be done from the "ivory tower." Rather, it should involve real classroom examples and students in which teachers can look at hands-on scenarios and say "this is an appropriate referral and this is not."

The next recommendation evolves out of the first, that is, if training on appropriate referral and identification is provided, one might foresee that many at-risk students will no longer be referred to special education for services. Alternative resources, strategies and programs will need to be provided through regular education for these at-risk, "marginal" students who do not qualify for special education. Although such programs may well be individualized at the local level, it is likely that the WDE will have to take a leadership role in terms of setting policies and making funding available to promote the development of such at-risk services.

Similarly, state level policies and funding structures should be amended to promote the widespread adoption of different types of professional development which, results from this study and other research suggests, have the greatest potential for actually making a difference. That is, funding could be made available to promote such things as: inter-district visitations, mentoring arrangements, job shadowing, faculty study groups and collaborative work sessions. Perhaps funding or alternative resources could be made available to help schools and districts specifically allocate time for teachers to work together – which is an absolute necessity if inclusion is to be carried out successfully. In addition, "train the trainers" types of models could be vigorously promoted. Such models certainly hold potential for making training opportunities available to more people (both in terms of quantity and breadth). Also, teachers appear to be highly receptive to help provided by other *expert* teachers. Indeed, Wyoming already has a mechanism like this in place with the several Distinguished Educators who serve as regional resources for districts. Results from this study suggest that this concept could fruitfully be applied to the area of special education.

Next, a more regional and/or local approach to training needs to be taken in order to promote participation by: 1) more than one or two people from a given site; and 2) other staff in addition to special education teachers (i.e., regular education teachers and administrators, teacher aides, and parents). Trainings need to be brought out into the corners of the state and not just be located in the big cities (e.g., Casper, Cheyenne). *Thus, a major recommendation of this report is that future CSPD activities should be, for the most part, decentralized.* That is, several of the activities associated with assessing needs and meeting identified needs should primarily be carried out at the regional and local level. Indeed, WASEA regional groups are already in place, quite active (they meet every couple of months or so) and are a valuable resource to participating individuals. Similarly, the Preschool Directors get together regularly. In order to enhance the sensitivity and the

credibility of CSPD, it is essential that such bodies are actively involved in each of the suggested activities listed below.

First, it is recommended that comprehensive regional and state resource directories by developed. As part of such a directory, experienced individuals across Wyoming (not just contact organizations) would be listed according to area of expertise (e.g., disability type or content area). Thus, if a teacher has a student come in with a disability which they have not yet previously encountered, they could easily pick up the directory and locate 4 or 5 other people in the state that have experience with this type of disability. However, such listings would need to be updated regularly so that they do not quickly become obsolete. Another part of such a directory could be to describe effective practices and unique programs existing across the state. Highlighting the good things that people are doing would provide much needed recognition and also provide ideas to others so they are not constantly having to "reinvent the wheel." There are so many good things happening in Wyoming -- there is just no way to know what and where they are. A first step to developing any statewide resource directory would be to have local districts contribute to their regions: 1) listings of their teachers by area of expertise; and 2) descriptions of things that they are doing that they have found to be particularly effective. This would be most time consuming the first time it is put together; however, afterwards regions could just have their local members review and update their submissions on a biannual basis.

Similarly, there is some data which suggests that people in the state would find it useful to have a central clearinghouse for information pertaining to special education. Such a *clearinghouse* could be responsible for collecting up-to-date information on: current research, changes or clarifications in special education rules and regulations, available funding sources, providers of professional development organized by topic areas, and could even maintain a database of job openings and eligible candidates. This last piece could include keeping a file of qualified candidates organized by job type and areas in the state that they would be willing to move to. This would be particularly useful for rural districts who find it difficult to find qualified candidates to fill positions in special education and would also be useful for administrators when unexpected vacancies occur at "inconvenient" times of the year. Notably, such a clearinghouse could, for the most part, be run via a customized web page. A web page would be an inexpensive way to disseminate information, allow for little or no lag time in posting new information, and set up access so that resumes could be placed directly into a database where potential employers could conduct their own searches by both job category and location.

Admittedly, there will be time and money involved with developing and maintaining both a resource directory and a web page (or another mechanism to set up an information clearinghouse). However, even if the WDE does not have the staffing capabilities to perform these functions in-house, an RFP could be issued so that these functions could be performed by an outside consultant. The initial expense of such activities would be diffused in the long run because of the time it would save teachers and administrators in trying to track down much of this information themselves – such time could be better spent in actual service delivery to special education students. Moreover, by focusing

attention on what it can do to help provide resources to people, the WDE will improve its reputation among localities.

In addition, future CSPD needs assessments should encompass a variety of different activities and utilize multiple sources of data. Some of these data would appropriately be collected at the state level, much of it would be collected at the local and regional levels. Specifically, it is recommended that future CSPD needs assessments not rely solely on a statewide survey. It is questionable as to whether even a revised survey would be able to collect the type of information necessary for planning specific training activities. Rather, some information pertinent to CSPD could be included under the umbrella of the annual staff development survey conducted by the State of Wyoming. The types of data relevant to CSPD which could appropriately be collected via such a statewide survey includes information on: 1) the educational background of special education staff; 2) actual participation of all staff in professional development activities related to special education in terms of frequency, duration, type, format and content; 3) time and resource allocation for collaboration among teachers; 4) utilization and value placed upon existing and newly developed state resources for special education; and 5) staff turnover and attrition among special education staff and the number of new hires, including how they were accessed and where they came from (this gets at the supply/demand aspect of CSPD). In addition, if a web site was set up it could document amount of usage of this resource and also maintain records as to the status of supply/demand of staff for special education in Wyoming.

Clearly, the University of Wyoming needs to undertake several activities to ensure that the preservice it is offering is comprehensive, up-to-date, and meeting the needs of both students and employers. Such activities need not be overly time consuming nor expensive and would provide much needed preservice data for CSPD. A first step would be to conduct a follow-up survey on a random sample of graduates while they are still in their first year of teaching. Such a survey could simply ask such things as "what did they feel prepared to do?" and "what were they not prepared for?" It would also provide information as to where UW graduates are going, which is needed for the supply/demand component of CSPD. Another step would be for the UW to begin utilizing district and/or regional representatives (from special education and other fields) in helping them articulate a future for both preservice and continuing education opportunities offered by UW. Creating such a dialogue could also contribute to improved relations between local districts and the university and perhaps increase the frequency with which administrators go directly to the UW to recruit staff.

In sum, state level data collection activities for CSPD could include: some types of information collected via a statewide survey; additional supply/demand information collected from the Professional Teaching Standards Board, the UW, and perhaps an employment clearinghouse; preservice data collected via UW; and, finally, the WDE could institute a process where questions and suggestions received by the WDE in regards to special education could be systematically documented so that they could be tabulated on a biannual basis. This last recommendation might also help eradicate perceived

inconsistencies in answers provided by the WDE to special education questions posed by districts.

In regards to data on *specific needs* for professional development, it is recommended that these data be collected and summarized at local and regional levels (although the state could then look at commonalities across regions in the state). There are numerous reasons to support this recommendation. First, it appears that special education needs are often very student and staff specific – changing rapidly along with staff and students who are in the district. Local districts are the ones who are most capable of detecting such rapidly changing needs and also need to be provided with flexibility and resources so that they can address such needs as they arise. Furthermore, many localities are already collecting such types of information, in part, because they feel that state level data collection activities have not been useful in helping them plan professional development. Mechanisms can be put into place to help coordinate such data collection activities and to help assure the quality of data being collected. Specifically, CSI (in consultation with the WDE and regional WASEA groups) could develop a list of maybe five acceptable methods of collecting local data on CSPD needs (and even attach model protocols for each of these methods). Regional WASEA groups could then be used as coordinating bodies to 1) determine what methods will be used by districts in their region to collect data on CSPD needs; and 2) summarize the locally collected data on a regional basis. As part of this second function, regions would get together and decide what their needs are as a whole as well as identifying locally specific needs. Thus, they could easily highlight common areas of need and, if they choose to get together in offering professional development, that would perhaps make it easier to bring training opportunities within a reasonable distance of potential participants. In applying for funds, it should be structured so that regions can apply for training funds, but maintain the option so local districts can apply for funds separately, in the event that they have needs specific to them which are not shared by others in the region.

Notably, the above represents a radical departure from how CSPD has been conducted in the past. As such, guidance and supervision will be needed -- especially in the beginning. At the WDE, there are already regional representatives who could be responsible for coordinating and guiding this process. Such coordination and guidance could include disseminating materials to the regional bodies, establishing timelines for completion of specific activities, and collecting the necessary pieces of information from each individual region. WDE regional representatives could also compare the grants allocated and specific activities undertaken in response to regional and local findings. A central "calendar of professional development activities" which would include trainings provided by the state, regionally and locally could then be easily compiled and disseminated to the regions. Finally, if regional and local people are to assume some of these responsibilities (which they are, in many instances, already doing informally), the State will need to provide help in terms of time, money and supplies so that this does not place an undue burden on individuals within districts and on members of the regional WASEA groups.

Finally, two other issues should be noted. First, a limitation of the 1997-1998 CSPD needs assessment is that it did not collect data from parents or teacher aides. These groups need to be accessed directly in future CSPD needs assessments. The guidelines for collecting local needs data could even include mechanisms for collecting data from these groups although, confidentiality issues might make it difficult to for local districts to receive candid responses from parents. In light of this, it is advisable that, as part of next year's CSPD needs assessment, the WDE could arrange to collect qualitative data (similar in method to the data collected this year) from a random sample of parents chosen from listings obtained from the Parent Information Network or a similar support organization.

The final issue is that someone (be it the Legislature or the WDE) needs to address the issue of competitive pay in Wyoming. No type of employment clearinghouse can address the broader issue here, that is, salaries need to be competitive and commensurate with experience and expertise in order to attract and retain the types of staff needed to effectively serve special education students.

Appendix A

Telephone Interview Protocol
(Teachers)

CSPD Telephone Protocol

Respondent Name: _____

First Attempt: _____
Date & Time: _____ Interviewer Name: _____

Second Attempt: _____
Date & Time: _____ Interviewer Name: _____

Third Attempt: _____
Date & Time: _____ Interviewer Name: _____

After three unsuccessful attempts, please refer to Chris or Mariam.

CODES:
AM - answering machine
BZ - busy
CB - callback at another scheduled time (write date and time in space provided on this form and on calendar)
CMP - completed
DS - number disconnected or wrong number
NA - no answer
NH - not at home (someone else answers phone)
REF - refusal (please explain details of refusal in comment space on this page)

Rescheduled Interview:
Date: _____ Time: _____

FOR COMPLETED INTERVIEWS:

Interviewer Name: _____
Date and Time: _____
Interview #: _____ (This number should be recorded on tape at end of interview).

Comments:

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CSPD Telephone Protocol

Hello, is _____ there? Hi, my name is _____ and I am calling from the Center for School Improvement. On behalf of the Wyoming Department of Education, the Center for School Improvement is conducting telephone interviews with both special education and regular education teachers across the state. The purpose of these interviews is to identify the major training and technical assistance needs of different groups of people who are involved in providing services to children with disabilities. You may recall completing a purple form at the end of the school year in which you agreed to participate in this interview. You indicated on this form that _____ [MORNING, AFTERNOON, EVENING] would be a convenient time to call you. The interview will take between 30 and 45 minutes. Is this a good time for you?

[ASK ONLY IF THIS TIME IS NOT CONVENIENT] Would you like to schedule a more convenient time?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The information gathered from these interviews will remain strictly confidential. Because taking notes during the interview would be very time consuming, this interview will be tape recorded. However, please note that all names will be excluded from the transcribed interviews, so there will be no way to relate your responses to you as an individual. Also, please note that although we will ask you which district and school you work in, this information will only be used so that we can group results by size of the school and district as well as by region. Do you have any questions or problems with what I have just mentioned? [IF THE RESPONDENT REFUSES TO BE RECORDED, ASK IF YOU MAY CONTINUE INTERVIEW, TURN OFF RECORDING DEVICE AND MERELY TAKE FIELD NOTES. REMIND HIM/HER THAT THE INTERVIEW MAY TAKE A LITTLE LONGER].

May we proceed with the interview?

Q1. Fill in gender
1. Male
2. Female

Q2. [OPTIONAL QUESTION - CAN TAKE INFORMATION OFF OF PURPLE FORM] Which district do you work for? _____

Q3. Which school do you work for? _____

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[ASK FOLLOWING QUESTIONS OF ALL RESPONDENTS EVEN IF INFORMATION IS ON PURPLE FORM.

Q4. What is your job? [CIRCLE RESPONSE]

1 Regular education teacher: *Specify subject/grade* _____
2 Special education teacher
3 Other: *specify* _____

Q5. How long have you been working at *your current job?* [CIRCLE RESPONSE]

1 Less than 3 months
2 3 to 6 months
3 7 months to 1 year
4 1 year to 2 years
5 3 years to 5 years
6 6 years to 10 years
7 more than 10 years

Q6. How long have you been working as a regular/special education teacher [REFER TO Q4]?

1 Less than 3 months
2 3 to 6 months
3 7 months to 1 year
4 1 year to 2 years
5 3 years to 5 years
6 6 years to 10 years
7 more than 10 years

Q7. How long have you been working with students with disabilities?

1 Less than 3 months
2 3 to 6 months
3 7 months to 1 year
4 1 year to 2 years
5 3 years to 5 years
6 6 years to 10 years
7 more than 10 years

Q8. Can you describe the setting(s) in which you primarily provide services to students with disabilities? [CIRCLE RESPONSE]
[IF TEACHER INDICATES SERVING STUDENTS IN MORE THAN ONE SETTING, PLEASE PROBE FOR APPROXIMATELY WHAT PORTION OF THEIR TIME THEY SPEND IN EACH SETTING.]

Setting	Approximate portion of time
1 Inclusion	
2 Resource room	
3 Self-contained class	
4 Other: *Specify* _____	

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Q4. Can you tell me about the type(s) of students with disabilities you served in the past year and roughly how many students fell into each of these disability categories? [HAVE RESPONDENT LIST FREELY AND MARK DOWN NUMBERS OF STUDENTS IN EACH CATEGORY]

Disability Category	Number of Students
1 Autistic Disability	
2 Deaf-Blind Disability	
3 Developmental Disability	
4 Emotional Disability	
5 Health Disability	
6 Hearing Disability	
7 Learning Disability	
8 Mental Disability	
9 Orthopedic Disability	
10 Speech Language Disability	
11 Traumatic Brain Injury Disability	
12 Visual Disability	
13 Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	
14 Multiple Disabilities: *see below*	
15 Other: *Specify*	

[IF TEACHER IS NOT SURE WHAT CATEGORY A PARTICULAR STUDENT SHOULD QUALIFY UNDER, PLEASE ASK THEM WHAT CATEGORY CHILD IS DESIGNATED UNDER ON HIS/HER IEP. ALSO, IF A TEACHER CATEGORIZES A CHILD AS HAVING MULTIPLE DISABILITIES, PLEASE DESIGNATE COMBINATION OF DISABILITIES CHILD HAS, AS WELL AS WHICH CONDITION IS CONSIDERED PRIMARY AND WHICH IS CONSIDERED SECONDARY].

FOR MULTIPLE DISABILITIES, PLEASE COMPLETE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

Combination of disabilities	Primary Disability	Secondary Disability

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Q10. Have you noticed any trends in the composition of the special education student population in your district in the past few years? [PROBE/EXPLANATION: WHAT TYPES OF DISABILITIES IS YOUR DISTRICT SEEING MORE CASES OF AMONG STUDENTS? WHAT DISABILITIES IS YOUR DISTRICT SEEING FEWER CASES OF AMONG STUDENTS?]

Q11. What populations of students with disabilities do you feel *most* comfortable working with? [RECORD CODES]

Q12. What populations of students with disabilities do you feel *least* comfortable working with? [RECORD CODES]

Q13. What populations of students are served *outside* of the district?

PROMPTS:
Why are they served outside of the district? [PROBE: WHY AREN'T THEY SERVED IN THE DISTRICT?]

Where are they served?

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Next, I'm going to ask you a few questions about your previous experiences with professional development activities related to special education. Again, remember that this is a confidential interview -- your honest opinions are appreciated.

Q14. Please describe any professional development activities *pertaining to special education* in which you have participated over the *past three years:*

[PLEASE NOTE: IF THE TEACHERS INDICATES THEY HAVE PARTICIPATED IN TOO MANY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS TO DESCRIBE ALL OF THEM, PLEASE ASK FOR THOSE ACTIVITIES IN WHICH THEY HAVE PARTICIPATED OVER THE PAST YEAR. PLEASE MAKE A NOTE IF THIS OCCURS.]

PROMPT AS NECESSARY FOR:

WHERE WHEN HOW LONG FORMAT WHO PAYS BY WHOM
WHAT(TOPIC)

WHAT (TOPIC)	WHERE	WHEN	HOW LONG	BY WHOM	FORMAT	WHO PAID

[USE AND ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS AS NECESSARY.]

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[IF THE RESPONDENT LISTS CONFERENCES OR WORKSHOPS AS THEIR ONLY EXAMPLES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, USE FOLLOWING PROBE: INCLUDE RESPONSES ON ABOVE TABLE.]

Are there any additional activities that you have participated in as part of your job that you would consider professional development?

[ADDITIONAL PROMPTS AS NECESSARY: ASK THESE QUESTIONS AFTER YOU HAVE RECEIVED DETAILS OF SPECIFIC PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES. THESE PROBES ARE MEANT TO INCLUDE AN OVERALL PICTURE OF ALL OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES.]

What was useful or relevant to you from these development activities?

What did you like about the professional development you participated in?

What did you *not* like about the professional development you just described?

What changes have occurred for your students as a result of your participation in the staff development described?

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Q19. Think about the trainings *relating to special education* that you were aware of but did not attend. Why didn't you attend?

Q20. What characteristics of available professional development opportunities make *you* want to attend?
[WHAT INCENTIVES ENCOURAGE YOUR PARTICIPATION.]

Q21. What types of development opportunities are well-attended *by personnel* who work with students with disabilities *in your school*?

Q22. Who decides what professional development activities you attend?

Q23. How do you usually hear about professional development opportunities related to special education?
[IF HEAR BY MAILINGS, PROBE FOR IF THEY ARE RECEIVED AT HOME OR AT WORK.]

The following questions ask about your preferences regarding <u>future</u> professional development activities pertaining to special education.

Q24. What are the three topics or areas relating to special education which are your highest priorities for development *in the next year*?

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Q25. In your opinion, what would be the most effective format and method for training you in these areas?

WHEN	WHERE	WHO	FORMAT (HOW)	LENGTH

Q26. What would be the most effective strategy for notifying you of development opportunities?
[IF THEY FEEL THAT BE MAIL IS MOST EFFECTIVE, PROBE FOR IF AT HOME OR AT WORK IS BETTER.]

Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about your access to various special education resources.

Q27. What kinds of situations arise in your job in which you are required to seek assistance or information from sources outside of your classroom?

Q28. Who or where do you go for this information?

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Q29. How likely is it that you would access the following avenues for receiving additional information about development opportunities, resources, and proven practices? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the *least* likely to access and 5 being the *most* likely to access.

E-mail/Internet
Compressed video technology
Postings in your school (i.e. Bulletin boards, teacher's lounge, etc.)
Teachers or contacts in your district
Teachers or contacts in your region
Teachers or contacts outside your region
Educational Resource Center
Wyoming Department of Education
University of Wyoming
Other colleges

The following questions relate to the area of collaboration among school personnel in providing services to students with disabilities.

Q30. Could you describe your experiences collaborating with other personnel in order to serve students with disabilities?

[ADDITIONAL PROBES AS NECESSARY]
Types of personnel collaborated with/teams

Overall, have your experiences collaborating with other personnel been positive or negative

What is effective with collaboration

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What is difficult for you with collaboration efforts

What training would help with collaboration efforts

Experiences with parents

Q31. Do you work closely with a teacher aide(s) in providing services to students with disabilities? (IF NO, SKIP TO #34)
1 Yes
2 No

Q32. Can you briefly describe the role of teacher aide(s) in providing services to special education students in your classroom?

Q33. What types of training do your teacher aide(s) need to help them meet the needs of special education students?

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Q34. *We are going to ask you about how comfortable and familiar you feel with some different topics pertaining to special education.*

With one being Not At all Comfortable and five being Very Comfortable, please rate how comfortable you are with:

a) teaching a wide range of abilities in a single classroom
b) working collaboratively with other groups in providing services to the disabled.
c) working with students with different types of disabilities.
d) effectively and successfully carrying out inclusion in the classroom.
e) recognizing students with disabilities.
f) utilizing different types of instructional strategies to adapt or modify the environment or instruction for students from special populations.
g) monitoring student progress towards his/her IEP objectives.
h) monitoring the progress of students with disabilities in meeting district performance standards.
i) effectively utilizing assistive technology when appropriate.
j) effectively managing behavior of students with disabilities in your classroom.
k) HS ONLY, arranging and preparing for the student's transition to exit high school.
l) ALL OTHERS, arranging and preparing for the student's transition to the next grade level.

Finally, for classification purposes, I am going to ask you a few demographic questions.

Q35. Which best describes your educational background?
1 Graduated college: *Specify major:* _____
2 Master's: *Specify area (specialization):* _____
3 PHD/EDD: *Specify area:* _____
4 Other: *Specify* _____

Q36. Where were you educated?
1 In-state: *specify where* _____
2 Out of state: *specify where* _____

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Q37. What were the *strengths* in your training relating to special education at this institution?
[IF THEY EXPRESS THAT IT IS TOO LONG AGO AND THAT THEY DO NOT REMEMBER, PROBE WITH: REMEMBER BACK TO YOUR FIRST YEAR OUT OF SCHOOL. IN WORKING WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS, DID YOU FEEL PREPARED IN YOUR FIRST JOB OR WERE THERE A LOT OF SURPRISES?]

Q38. What were the *weaknesses* in your training relating to special education at this institution?
[SAME PROBE AS ABOVE].

Q39. Where or from whom do you feel you have learned the most about how to meet the needs of students with disabilities? [PROMPTS: FROM OTHER TEACHERS, BY EXPERIENCE, FROM EDUCATION,ETC.]

Q40. What certifications do you hold?
1 Elementary Education
2 Secondary Education
3 General Special Education Endorsement
4 Learning Disabled
5 Emotionally Disturbed
6 Mentally Retardation
7 Visually Impaired
8 Hearing Impaired
9 Speech/Language Impaired
10 Early Childhood
11 Other

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Q41. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Would you like us to send you a copy of the executive summary of the final report from this study? Included with this summary will be the specific recommendations provided to the Wyoming Department of Education based upon these interviews.
[IF YES, WRITE MAILING ADDRESS]

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Finally, we'd like to ask you about how you think we should go about collecting data about personnel needs related to special education on an ongoing basis. This year we are conducting telephone interviews and focus groups. Based upon these results we are planning to develop a survey instrument that is both relevant and valid. The reason the Wyoming Department of Education is leaning towards a quantitative survey is that this is a relatively inexpensive way to gather data from a large number of people. I have two questions for you.

Q43. First, do you feel people will respond to a survey?
1 Yes *Go to Q44*
2 No *Go to Q45*

Q44. How do you think we should go about mailing a survey? **Probe for: time of year, who to send it to, which address to use, accompanying letter?**
Go to Q46 when finished

Q45. What do you think we could do to get them to respond to a survey?
1 Nothing

Q46. What other ways do you think we could gather information on training needs?

IF ANSWERED NO TO Q43, THEN: *Thank you for your time and giving us this valuable information. Please call the Center for School Improvement at 1(800)245-2631 if you have any questions.*

Q47. As we develop a survey instrument, would you be interested in reviewing the instrument and the procedures for administration in order to provide feedback to us?
1 Yes
2 No

Thank you for your time and giving us this valuable information. Please call the Center for School Improvement at 1(800)245-2631 if you have any questions.

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Focus Group Protocol
(Administrators)

CSPD NEEDS ASSESSMENT
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction

Good Morning! My name is _____ . Welcome and thank you for agreeing to participate in this discussion group. We appreciate you taking the time from your regional meeting to share your opinions with us.

The purpose of our discussion today is to find out about professional development needs related to special education. Specifically, we want to find out about what you feel are priority areas that need to be addressed by professional development. We also would like to hear about your previous experiences with professional development that you or your staff have received in the past.

Before we begin, I need to establish a few ground rules. First, our discussion will be tape recorded and will later be transcribed so that a content analyses can be performed. All of you will be assigned false names and will not be identified in any way on the transcribed documents nor in any subsequent reports that result from these discussions. Because of the recording, please speak clearly and try to speak one at a time. _____ will be taking notes, so that in the event the recorder malfunctions, we will still have a record of what was said.

While time is short today, it is important that everyone has an opportunity to express their concerns and share their experiences. It will be my job to insure that everyone who has something to say has that opportunity. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers. No one in the group, including me, is to be considered the expert on anything that we talk about. Therefore, please do not judge one another's opinions -- everyone's opinion is equally important in this discussion.

With those guidelines in mind, do you have any questions? Then let's begin.

Discussion Questions

1. First, could you each introduce yourselves and briefly describe what you do? In particular, please describe your role in providing professional development to staff members who provide services to special education students.

2. In terms of overall trends, how is your student population changing or how do you foresee it changing in the future? How will your special education programs have to adapt to serve these changing populations?

3 How difficult is it for you to fill positions with persons qualified to work with special education students? Is attrition a problem among your staff members who work with special education students?

4 From what you have seen in the past, in what areas are first year teachers prepared or unprepared when it comes to working with special education students?

5 What areas do you perceive as being strengths and weaknesses in your staff in terms of being able to provide necessary services to special education students? How does this vary by types of personnel? (e.g., regular classroom teachers, special ed teachers, teacher aides).

6 Which types of students do you feel your district is least prepared to serve? What typically happens with these students (e.g., sent outside of district, etc.)?

7 Can you tell me what you see as being the top three training needs among your staff members? How do these needs vary for different types of personnel?

8 I'd like you each to tell me briefly about experiences (both good and bad) that you or your staff have had with professional development in the past. What was good about these trainings? Bad?

9 What professional development do you feel people would be most responsive to in terms of format, content, location, and who should provide it? What could be done to encourage staff to attend trainings?

10. Finally, what types of information would be most useful for you in planning for professional development in your district?

Wrap-up

Summarize the major themes that have come up.

Ask: *"What would you like to add to my summary?"*

Moderator also *recognizes those points which were not fully discussed* and summarizes this and says *"it is too bad that there was not time to fully discuss these issues."*

Member Check

At this point, I am not looking for further discussion, but rather just a general idea of how you feel on the major issues discussed today.

How many of you would say that "....."

How many of you would agree that ....."

Closing Statements

I would again like to remind you that the discussions held here today are completely confidential. As the tapes from this discussion are transcribed, all names will be taken off of the transcriptions. I would also like to request that you respect the individuals in this room, and that you refrain from discussing the opinions or attributing them to specific individuals. You will receive a copy of the final report which will include the results from these discussions, as well as from the already completed teacher interviews, and you will see at this point that the results will only be reported in group form. Do you have any questions?

Thank you very much for all of your cooperation in this discussion. Your honest opinions are invaluable for determining training needs statewide.

Appendix B

Tuesday, May 20, 1997

Dear Special Education Director:

The key to improving the quality of instruction and services to special education students is the provision of ongoing, relevant and useful professional development opportunities. We need your help! The Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) and the Center for School Improvement (CSI) are redesigning the needs assessment process used to plan professional development relating to special education. This needs assessment is funded by the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) established by Public Law 94-142. Some contributing factors in the decision to revise the needs assessment were:

- the poor response to needs assessment questionnaires sent out in previous years;
- the negative feedback from district leaders such as yourself indicating that the information provided from CSPD was not useful to you in planning staff development pertaining to special education; and
- poor attendance to CSPD training activities being offered across the state.

In revising this needs assessment, input from *all stakeholders* involved with serving special education students is **critical**. We are asking your assistance in nominating six teachers to participate in brief phone interviews during the summer recess.

Enclosed are six forms for you to distribute to volunteer teachers that will give us the information we need to conduct the phone interviews. In selecting ***which six teachers*** to give the forms to, please try to select teachers with the following characteristics:

- Teachers who are **involved and interested** in special education.
- Teachers who are **willing to participate** in the study by sharing their views regarding what they see as the professional development needs for various groups (e.g., regular & special education teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, parents, etc.) who work with special education students.
- **Two of the teachers** should be **regular classroom teachers** who have at least one special education student (but preferably two or more) in their classes;
- The remaining **four** teachers should be **special education teachers**. (If your district does not have four special education teachers, please give the cards to as many special education teachers as your district has.);
- Special education and regular classroom teachers who have **been teaching for varying lengths of time**. *It would be best* if some of the teachers had three or

less years teaching experience and some had five or more years teaching experience.

- Special education and regular teachers who serve students with a **variety of disabilities**.

We will contact each nominated teacher individually and schedule an interview at a mutually convenient time during the summer. If you give the form to a teacher who decides not to participate, please pass that form along to another teacher who you feel would be appropriate.

The interviews should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes and will gather information pertaining to: 1) identification of the major training and technical assistance needs of the different target groups who provide services to children with disabilities; 2) establishing priorities for inservice programs; 3) the effectiveness of existing preservice and inservice programs; and 4) the types of needs assessment activities and procedures they would be responsive to in the future. Although interviews will focus on these questions, they will be loosely structured and open-ended to permit respondents to give spontaneous, genuine responses as well as allowing them to describe any concerns, frustrations and specific incidents relevant to the questions of interest.

In early fall, we will be conducting "focus group" interviews with special education directors, such as yourself, at the regional WASEA events. You will receive more information about these focus group interviews at a later date. Again, our goal and the earnest intention of the Wyoming Department of Education is to systematically improve the CSPD needs assessment process so that we can provide professional development activities responsive to the preferences of stakeholders in terms of content, format, location and times.

We appreciate your help in this undertaking and welcome any comments or questions from either you or interested teachers. The number at the Center for School Improvement is (800) 245-2631.

Sincerely,

Patty Muhlenkamp
Wyoming Department of Education

Mariam Manley
Center for School Improvement

Wyoming CSPD Needs Assessment

The key to improving the quality of instruction and services to special education students is the provision of ongoing, relevant and useful professional development opportunities. We need your help! The Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) and the Center for School Improvement (CSI) are redesigning the needs assessment process used to plan professional development relating to special education. This needs assessment is funded by the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) established by Public Law 94-142. Some contributing factors in the decision to revise the needs assessment were:

- the poor response to needs assessment questionnaires sent out in previous years;
- negative feedback from district leaders indicating that the information provided from CSPD was not useful in planning staff development pertaining to special education; and
- poor attendance to CSPD training activities being offered across the state.

In this development phase, input from involved, dedicated stakeholders, such as yourself, is crucial. We would like to set up a time (at your convenience) to speak with you to gather your opinions concerning professional development needs related to special education. Please note that all information gathered during these telephone interviews will remain strictly confidential and will be reported in aggregate form only. All participants will receive an executive summary of the report submitted to the Wyoming Department of Education at the completion of the project.

Please fill in the requested information below, fold it so that the return address is showing, and mail it back to us (postage is paid). Interviews will be conducted at a time convenient for you between June 15 and August 15, 1997 and should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. We appreciate your willingness to share your opinions with us -- input from teachers working with special education students on a daily basis is critical to the development of a successful and worthwhile system of professional development.

If you decide you do not wish to participate, please return this form to the special education director in your district, so he/she may locate someone in your district who is interested in participating.

Teacher Name _____ District _____
Number of years teaching _____ Grades you teach _____
Primary teaching assignment _____
Self-contained classroom or Itinerant teacher _____
Types of disabilities served _____
Home phone _____
Convenient times of the day to call _____
Dates you will be out of town between June 15 - August 15, 1997 _____